

His name was Marcus



4th GRADE
Alba Pratalia

HIS NAME WAS
MARCUS

By Alba Pratalia

First day of school. Fourth grade. The air still carries that scent of disinfectant and sun-warmed plastic chairs. Some backpacks have cartoon characters. Some still have the tags on. There's a nervous itch in the room, a collective hush of children sitting straighter than usual, like they think posture will save them.

Then the door opens.

Enter **Mr. Barnard**.

He doesn't so much walk in as *wander*—as if he took a wrong turn looking for a cigarette. Wrinkled corduroy jacket the color of old mustard. Checkered shirt, one button too low. Hair in a war with itself. Beard that looks like it started growing in protest and never stopped. No bag. No folders. Just soft suede shoes, dust-smudged, and hands in his

pockets like he's not here to teach, he's here to pick something up and leave.

He surveys the room.

Long pause.

A sigh like he's about to begin a long prison sentence.

Then—

"Good morning, band of degenerate bastards."

Silence.

Then:

A gasp.

Two kids snort and immediately look terrified they'll be punished.

A girl clutches her Disney lunchbox tighter.

One boy laughs, but it's a guilty kind of laugh, the

kind you make in church when someone farts during communion.

And in the back, a quiet kid named Trevor writes it down in his notebook. Word for word. Capital letters.

“GOOD MORNING, BAND OF DEGENERATE BASTARDS.”

Mr. Barnard walks to the desk—

But wait.

There is no desk.

Just a chair.

He shrugs and sits cross-legged on the floor like this is a yoga class for the criminally confused.

He doesn't say another word.

He just watches them.

And they watch back.

Like something in the zoo that might throw feces.

BARNARD

(leans back, hands still in pockets, eyes half-lidded

like he's halfway between sleep and contempt)

So. What do you have to learn from me?

—Silence. The cicadas chirp like it's a Sergio Leone showdown. A dry bush rolls across the tiled classroom floor even though all the windows are closed. Somewhere, the janitor feels a disturbance in the dust.

BARNARD

You don't know?

Then go and find out.

The cicadas double down. Another dried bush—possibly the same one in a different mood—tumbles past. The class sits like hostages in a David Lynch short film. One kid's eye twitches.

BARNARD

(claps once—sharp, echoing, like a gunshot in a church)

Now sissies.

Call the manager.

Or president.

Or principal.

Whatever you call it in this tax-funded asylum.

Google it. Ask Alexa. Perform an interpretive dance
if you must.

(beat)

Solve it for me.

*He pulls a flask from his pocket, inspects it, then
returns it without drinking. Just wanted them to
know it was there.*

No one moves.

Except Trevor.

Trevor is already Googling.

And so began the **general trauma of encountering
proactivity** in the fourth grade. A full-body paralysis
triggered not by fear, but by pure existential
confusion.

“Solve it for me.”

From a teacher.

A grown-up.

A supposed adult.

The phrase hung in the air like a leftover fart in a locked elevator.

No worksheets.

No bullet points.

No cute laminated name tags or behavior charts with stars and clouds and rainbows.

Just this man, sitting like a retired monk who’s seen too much bureaucracy to care anymore, staring at them with the gaze of someone silently daring you to tattle.

The kids look at each other like survivors of a shipwreck waiting to see who drowns first.

Someone raises a hand.

He doesn’t blink.

Another tries, "Uh, do we need to—"

Silence. Bearded indifference. Still sitting cross-legged like a Buddha with back pain and unresolved tax issues.

Outside the classroom, the chirping of cicadas reaches **season finale** levels. The same bush rolls past for a third time, now visibly annoyed.

And somewhere—deep in the rubbery halls of institutional administration—a phone rings.

No one picks it up.

Because this is life now.

"Not my problem," says the Principal, who has already scheduled three meetings on "student empowerment" and outsourced lunch duty to a drone.

Welcome to it, kiddos.

This is the system.

You are the cogs.

And Mr. Barnard?

Mr. Barnard isn't broken.

He just reads the manual aloud.

Silently.

BARNARD

(claps twice — *pop-pop*, like gunshots filtered through a shag carpet)

If I don't have the solution on my lap in less than five minutes,

you are all **very** welcome to collect your shit and get the fuck out of my team.

—or class,

whatever you call it here in this daycare for the semi-literate.

He doesn't raise his voice. He doesn't need to. It lands like thunder wrapped in velvet.

No one breathes.

*A girl who just learned the word “fuck” yesterday
feels both enlightened and spiritually injured.*

Trevor closes his Chromebook.

Not out of fear.

He’s just not sure if this is still school or an audition
for a survival reality show.

Someone’s snack bag crinkles.

A rogue carrot stick hits the floor.

No one claims it.

In the back, one boy is halfway to tears but doesn’t
know why. It’s not what was said. It’s **how true it
felt.**

A faint shiver runs through the room.

Mr. Barnard leans back.

Hands behind his head.

Waiting for the answer.

Or the silence.

Whichever proves his point better.

BARNARD

(points without looking, like a drunk prophet
choosing a messiah at random)

You.

What's your name? Billy?

The boy blinks. His name is Marcus.

BARNARD

Doesn't matter. You're Billy now.

*The class turns to look at Billy-slash-Marcus like
he's just been handed the nuclear football and a
pack of gum.*

BARNARD

Well, Billy... now you're in charge.

Make this happen.

And with that, the transfer of cosmic burden is complete.

No further instructions. No rubric. No “learning outcome” pasted on the whiteboard in Comic Sans. Just a ten-year-old with sticky hands and undiagnosed ADHD now responsible for salvaging the dignity of an entire room.

Billy (formerly Marcus) swallows audibly.

“Make what happen?” his eyes scream.

Barnard doesn't blink. Doesn't clarify.

Just stares, smiling faintly like a man watching ants rebuild a hill he just kicked.

Somewhere, deep in the school's administrative core, a printer jams.

And no one will fix it.

Because **Billy's in charge now.**

Tick, tock.

Billy, who up until thirty seconds ago thought leadership was something you got from winning dodgeball, stares down the chasm of sudden responsibility.

He clears his throat.

Then clears it again, because the first one sounded like a dying hamster.

BILLY (tense, high-pitched):

Okay. Uh. I guess we should, like... maybe... figure this out?

He doesn't know what "this" is. He just knows there's a man with a beard who might be a teacher, might be a war criminal, and who definitely threatened exile.

He looks around.

BILLY:

Uh... I need help. Everyone who knows things, come here. Now.

Five kids shuffle forward instinctively. They don't know what they know, but they've watched enough Netflix to recognize the tone of someone forming a resistance cell.

A girl with glasses pushes her chair like she means business.

A quiet boy named Ethan takes out a notepad, like a war correspondent embedded in chaos.

Two others whisper “brainstorm,” which one of them mishears as “brain storm” and pictures literal brains falling from the sky.

Trevor opens his Chromebook again, typing furiously into a Google Doc labeled:

“Emergency Protocol: Mr. Barnard Situation.”

Within thirty seconds, they have:

- One whiteboard stolen from the wall.
- Three markers (two dried out, one scented like regret).

- A hand-raised vote to establish whether Barnard is bluffing. (Result: 8 yes, 11 no, 3 abstain.)
- A strategy group debating whether to contact the principal via phone, email, or spiritual séance.

They don't know it yet, but **they've accidentally created a think tank.**

Billy stands in the center, arms crossed like he's seen in movies. He doesn't know what "synergy" means, but he says it three times in a row and everyone nods.

Mr. Barnard watches from his chair like a zookeeper observing chimpanzees figure out algebra with a stick and a dead frog.

Still silent.

Still waiting.

Still dangerous.

GIRL WITH GLASSES

(pushes up her frames like she's activating a tactical interface)

Wait. He *did* say something. He said—

"He asked what we have to learn from him."

Everyone turns, realizing she just quoted scripture.

ETHAN

(flipping through his notes like they're declassified files)

Yeah, and then he said... um... *"ask the admiral."*

GIRL WITH GLASSES

He said principal.

ETHAN

Whatever. Same vibe. Military-industrial-academic complex.

BILLY

(nods with sudden authority, pointing at Ethan like

a mafia boss assigning a hit)

Yes. Yes. Or Google it. He said that too.

A murmur of consensus rises. This is how revolutions begin—in confusion, with poor leadership and accidental coherence.

BILLY

Okay.

Team A: Find out what we're supposed to learn.

Team B: Contact the principal.

Team C: Start Googling "what is the purpose of school."

Team D: Look busy so he doesn't destroy us.

One kid raises a hand.

"What team am I in?"

BILLY

You're Team E. You get me a juice box. I'm sweating from the pressure.

*Behind them, Mr. Barnard scratches his beard like
an indifferent god watching his creations evolve
slightly too fast.*

Still silent.

Still amused.

Possibly asleep with his eyes open.

GIRL WITH GLASSES

(eyes wide, now fully in crisis-management mode)

Wait—wait. He said “**on his lap.**”

Less than five minutes.

On. His. Lap.

ETHAN

(looking like he’s just been handed a live grenade)

What does that *mean*? Like physically? Like a
printed report? A symbolic object? A dove?

BILLY

(panicked, eyes darting)

Maybe it’s a metaphor!

GIRL WITH GLASSES

It's a fourth-grade class, not a poetry slam! It's literal! He wants something *on his lap!*

ETHAN

Do we... bring him *knowledge?* Like a summary?

KID FROM TEAM C

(googling furiously)

"How to physically place abstract educational value on someone's lap"... No relevant results, just a weird Quora thread.

BILLY

(pacing now, sweat forming like he's in a hostage negotiation)

Okay, okay—we brainstorm, we compile, we deliver. That's the plan. Anyone got a printer?

ETHAN

Why would I bring a printer to school, Billy?!

GIRL WITH GLASSES

We'll write it. By hand. Old school. Analog panic.

Three kids grab paper. One sharpens a pencil like it's a prison shiv. Someone starts scribbling "The Purpose of Education" in bubble letters before being told to shut up and stick to content.

Meanwhile—

Barnard doesn't move.

Just taps his foot.

Soft suede shoe.

Tick.

Tock.

Motherfuckers.

BILLY

(voice cracking with premature authority)

Alright people—this is now **corporate**.

Protocol: Deliver or Die.

He slams his palm on a desk. It barely makes a sound, but the symbolism lands.

GIRL WITH GLASSES

Okay, I'm writing the manifesto. "We believe Mr. Barnard is here to teach us how to think, not what to think." Sound pretentious enough?

ETHAN

Add something about self-direction and critical autonomy. Use words you don't understand. That buys time.

KID FROM TEAM B

(muttering into a disconnected phone)

Still no answer from the principal. Honestly, I think she's hiding.

KID FROM TEAM D

(hunched in the corner, spinning a fidget toy aggressively)

We're visibly busy. Mission accomplished.

BILLY

(double-checking his internal clock, which is actually just counting panic beats)

We have one minute left. One. Minute.

Somebody fold this paper like it's a sacred scroll.

We're delivering salvation.

They wrap up the "solution." Three pages. One misspelled quote. A crude drawing of a brain wearing glasses labeled "LEARNING."

Billy takes it, holds it like it's a Fabergé egg full of uranium, and marches to the front.

Mr. Barnard doesn't move.

His lap is ready.

The silence is biblical.

The moment is apocalyptic.

Billy extends the offering.

All of fourth grade holds its breath.

Tick.

Tock.

The Document

("Project: What We Have to Learn from Mr. Barnard")

Compiled by: The Fourth Grade Think Tank

Time allotted: 4 minutes, 52 seconds

Ink smudged by: Fear

PAGE 1 – *The Mission Statement*

"We believe Mr. Barnard is here to teach us not facts, but skills. Not multiplication tables, but multiplication of perspective. Not how to memorize, but how to weaponize thought."

(Note: "weaponize" was suggested by Ethan. No one objected.)

PAGE 2 – *Findings from Team Google*

- Mr. Barnard is likely a teacher.
- Teachers deliver content and emotional instability.
- The goal of school is “personal development” and “academic excellence,” both of which are probably lies.
- Brainstorm led to philosophical inquiry on the nature of institutional learning.
- Someone asked if life is real or just an elaborate simulation designed to measure our worth via spelling tests.

PAGE 3 – *Proposed Curriculum, Written in Crisis*

1. Week 1: “How to function under vague authority and suede-based threats.”
 2. Week 2: “Existential dread and how to weaponize it.”
 3. Week 3: “Advanced independence: when adults abandon the premise.”
 4. Week 4: “Problem-solving with no rubric, no mercy, and no plan.”
 5. Ongoing: “Learning to Google faster than your classmates.”
 6. Optional: “Therapy.”
-

Addendum:

Crude drawing of Mr. Barnard labeled “**DEALER OF TRUTH**”, with sunglasses drawn over his eyes and laser beams shooting from his brain.

Quote in crayon:

“You don’t know what you have to learn? Then go and find out.” – Mr.

Barnard, 08:02 AM, First Day of
School.

It's handed to Barnard.

He doesn't read it.

Just lets it sit on his lap.

Like a cat that wandered over and chose him.

Mr. Barnard takes the report without ceremony.

Flips through the pages like he's checking for
hidden cash.

He pauses.

Sniffs it.

Possibly out of curiosity. Possibly because it smelled
like desperation.

Then—without fanfare—he tosses the entire report
into the air like it's confetti at a funeral.

Papers flutter.

Kids flinch.

One screams internally.

BARNARD

This is **bullshit**.

He stands, slowly, like a bear waking up from hibernation just to file a complaint.

BARNARD

I need a **content**.

A **scope**.

And a **list of deliverables**.

I am not here for interpretive doodles of me
shooting brain-lasers,
though admittedly,
that was flattering.

He begins pacing. No destination. Just force of habit. The suede shoes whisper across the floor like they're disappointed in everyone.

BARNARD

I'm here to teach what?

Math?

History?

Trauma surgery?

The semiotics of modern despair?

Mushroom identification in post-apocalyptic
landscapes?

No one answers. They don't know if he's joking.

They don't know if he knows.

BARNARD

What's my **syllabus**, team?

Does anyone have it?

Did anyone, I don't know, *ask*?

Or are we just vibing until June?

He picks up a paper off the ground. Reads it.

“We believe Mr. Barnard is here to
teach us not facts, but skills.”

He nods.

Then **eats the corner of the page.**

Chews.

Swallows.

BARNARD

Taste of delusion.

Too much ink.

Back to silence.

Tick.

Tock.

The goddamn cicadas are laughing.

And so it is written.

In the holy scriptures of fluorescent-lit despair and laminated chaos.

The **Fourth Grade** learns its first real lesson—not from a textbook, but from a man who looks like he once lost a custody battle to a feral dog:

Corporate Rule #1: *You're on your own.*

There is no savior. No safety net. Just you and your underdeveloped executive function.

Corporate Rule #2: *Figure it out.*

There is no manual. There is no guidance. There is only panic, initiative, and the illusion of consensus.

Corporate Rule #3: *Your first deliverable will always—**always**—be thrown in the trash.*

Sometimes literally.

Sometimes metaphorically.

Occasionally ingested.

Mr. Barnard says nothing.

Not a nod.

Not a grunt.

Not a passive-aggressive sigh.

He simply returns to his chair.

Hands behind his head.

Eyes closed.

Possibly asleep. Possibly plotting.

A paper drifts down and lands on his lap like a peace offering from a failed coup.

Billy watches.

And he understands.

No applause. No gold star. No “good effort.”

Just—

Back to work, team.

And for the first time in recorded educational history... the children begin working without knowing what they’re working on.

BILLY

(straightens up, face grim like a child soldier in a corporate jungle)

Alright.

Go team.

He doesn't cheer.

He doesn't smile.

He just says it like a sentence carved into granite.

The others nod.

Ethan starts drafting a SWOT analysis.

Girl With Glasses reboots her manifesto but now formats it in bullet points.

Trevor opens a new Google Doc titled “Deliverable v2 – The Redemption Arc.”

Someone—unironically—sets up a Kanban board on the whiteboard with three columns: “To Do,” “Doing,” and “Begging for Mercy.”

One kid cries. Quietly. Professionally.

Mr. Barnard exhales through his nose.

Might've been approval.

Might've been indigestion.

Unclear.

But the team is moving.

No direction.

No compass.

No God.

Just mission.

Just deadline.

Just **fourth-grade children executing agile workflow protocols under duress.**

Go team.

A boy—dumb, twitchy, marinated in impulse—leans over and **flicks a girl's braid.** Not playfully. Not flirtatiously. Just the way a mosquito tests your skin.

She jerks forward, startled.

The classroom pauses.

No gasps.

No tattling.

Just the chill of something primordial rising.

Mr. Barnard stands.

No change in expression.

No hurry in his bones.

He walks over like gravity answers to him.

Raises a hand—

And delivers a **sound, echoing slap** behind the boy's head.

Not cruel.

Not angry.

Just *formally corrective*. Like punctuation.

The boy goes **airborne**.

Whheeee.

Two full rotations.

Midair regret.

He lands next to the heating radiator with a noise
that suggests both physics and shame.

No words are spoken.

No eye contact.

No paperwork.

No parent-teacher conference.

Just the quiet, humming awareness settling into
every spine in the room:

Corporate Ethics: No harassment in the workplace.

Your body is your own.

Keep your damn hands—and flicks—to yourself.

There *will* be consequences.

Swift. Kinetic. Educational.

Barnard sits back down.

Closes his eyes again.

As if nothing happened.
Because to him, it didn't.
It was protocol.

Narration

Tick.

Tock.

The radiator hums softly, cradling the airborne idiot
like a lesson in mass and consequence.

And Billy—sweet, trembling Billy—feels the eyes of
the universe narrowing in on his forehead like a
sniper scope made of existential pressure.

Tick tock, Billy.

This ain't a game anymore.

It's your ass on the line.

You're the manager now.

The team lead.

The middle-management sacrificial goat.

And Mr. Barnard?

He's not your mentor.

He's not your ally.

He's the auditor from Hell, and he doesn't want
progress—

He wants **results**.

The clock keeps ticking.

The cicadas keep chirping.

The dried bush rolls past again, wearing sunglasses
now, judging him silently.

Tick.

Tock.

Deliverable or death.

And Billy?

Billy swallows hard, points to the board, and
whispers:

"Sprint two. Let's go."

SPRINT TWO INITIATED.

Billy snaps his fingers like a child warlord.
The Think Tank reboots itself with grim efficiency.

GIRL WITH GLASSES

(shuffling papers like classified documents)

We strip the fluff.

We focus on fundamentals.

This time it's clean, lean, and brutal.

ETHAN

(pacing, muttering like a Silicon Valley burnout)

Deliverables: clear.

Objective: defined.

Barnard wants *content*, *scope*, and *syllabus*.

We give him all three.

We give him the war plan.

TREVOR

Already prototyping. Drafting a table of contents so tight it squeaks.

KID FROM TEAM D

Accidentally made a Gantt chart while doodling.
We're using it now.

BILLY

(intense, eyes hollow with newfound age)
No jokes. No crayons. No brain lasers.
This is **school business now**.

A whiteboard becomes a battlefield.
Markers are swords.
Post-its become flags of war.

Subjects are listed.
Teaching scopes are drawn with arrows.
Week-by-week projections built by children who
still believe in Santa Claus—but not anymore.

Trevor yells: "We need a mission statement!"
Someone replies: "We are the product of a broken
system and we will perform!"
Approved.

The girl with glasses pulls out a ruler like a weapon.
Ethan starts formatting in MLA for no reason.
Someone cries again—still professionally.

And in the corner, Barnard opens one eye.
Just one.

Like Sauron,
but unionized.

Tick.
Tock.
The new document is rising.
A new testament.
This one won't be thrown.

Or if it is—

Billy's going down swinging.

Mr. Barnard sits like a throne grew under him.
Lap exposed.
Ready.

Like the sacrificial stone at the center of a corporate cult.

No words.

No glances.

Just suede shoes crossed casually and a lap that waits.

Tick.

The final draft is printed—handwritten, sweaty, barely legible, but tight.

Tock.

Billy takes it. He doesn't run. He walks. Slowly. Like he's marching into Mordor holding a quarterly report.

He stands before Barnard.

Raises the packet.

Barnard doesn't move.

The lap waits.

Billy places the document—softly, respectfully—**on the lap.**

Silence.

Barnard looks at it.

Looks at Billy.

Looks back at it.

Picks it up.

Weighs it in his hand.

Still says nothing.

Still that stare.

And then—

He flips the first page.

Tick.

Tock.

Motherfuckers.

The Document

("SYLLABUS: What Mr. Barnard Is Supposed to Teach Us, Apparently")

Compiled by: The 4th Grade Crisis Response Team™

Under Duress and Threat of Ejection

Submitted: Minute 4:59. Lap delivery successful.

COVER PAGE:

Minimalist.

Title in block letters:

“WE DON’T KNOW, BUT HERE’S
OUR BEST GUESS.”

Subtitle: “If this is wrong, please
specify before slapping anyone.”

There is no art. Only fear.

PAGE 1 – CONTENT

Subjects Mr. Barnard may be here to teach:

- **Mathematics** – possibly, though he doesn't carry a calculator and visibly hates numbers.
- **History** – maybe. If by "history" we mean "institutional trauma."
- **Language Arts** – doubtful. Swearing does not count as literary analysis.
- **Life Skills** – probable. Harsh, violent, unsanctioned life skills.
- **Corporate Survival Tactics** – confirmed.

Conclusion: subject undetermined. Proceeding with *multidisciplinary chaos* model.

PAGE 2 – SCOPE

Weeks 1–2:

- Establish power hierarchy.
- Fail first attempts.
- Learn Rule of Lap: All first drafts are disposable.

Weeks 3–6:

- Develop resilience under silence-based pressure.
- Practice resource extraction (a.k.a. Googling under stress).

Weeks 7–9:

- Workplace dynamics: Don't flick braids unless you want to taste radiator.
- Ethics training via slaps.

Weeks 10–12:

- Project-based learning: survival, delegation, group despair.
- Independent study: "What the fuck are we doing?"

Ongoing:

- Interpret Barnard's expressions for clues.
- Stay low. Deliver fast. No eye contact.

PAGE 3 – DELIVERABLES

- ✓ One (1) syllabus document, lap-delivered, per vague request.
- ✓ Functional chain of command (Billy).
- ✓ A class hierarchy now resembling a small start-up.

- ✓ No confirmed knowledge, but we are now agile.
 - ✓ Emotional scars in development.
 - ✓ Compliance level: 76%.
 - ✓ Morale: undefined.
 - ✓ Trevor cried again.
-

Appendix A – Suggested Titles for the Course

- *Advanced Fuck Around & Find Out*
 - *Intro to Applied Responsibility Without Support*
 - *Leadership Under Randomized Threat Models*
 - *Syllabus Construction for the Abandoned Child Within*
-

Signature line:

Billy (Team Lead, Acting Intern CEO, Scapegoat)

Trevor (Data Entry / Emotional Damage Specialist)
Girl With Glasses (Head of Research & Vengeance)
Ethan (Theorist / Panic Whisperer)

Barnard flips the page once.

Raises an eyebrow.

Smiles.

Just a twitch.

But it's there.

And for the first time—

No slap.

No insult.

No airborne child.

The lap accepts.

BARNARD

(flips the final page, nods like Caesar sparing a

gladiator)

Good.

History it is.

(pauses, eyes scanning the class like a predator
finally full)

Was it so hard?

The class exhales in unison.

“Phееееew.”

A sound not of relief, but of narrowly dodged
institutional homicide.

Billy **collapses** into a chair like a man who’s just
negotiated peace in the Middle East and didn’t even
get a juice box.

Girl With Glasses high-fives Ethan.

Ethan high-fives Trevor.

Trevor high-fives air.

Air understands.

One kid salutes.

Another weeps with joy.

A third opens his lunchbox and just eats out of shock.

BARNARD

(stretching like a man who's just made children suffer correctly)

Now.

Find me a desk.

And somewhere, deep in the soul of the fourth grade...

They realize—

The game has just begun.

Two Weeks Later...

The classroom is unrecognizable.

What was once a chaotic cluster of tiny desks and barely contained bladder control is now a **tight-run historical think tank**—equal parts war room, archive, and post-revolutionary triage center.

On the wall: a massive timeline made of string, post-its, blood, and broken pencils.

The eras are labeled:

"Ancient" — "Medieval" — "Colonialism (Oops)" — "Modern" — "Postmodern (Also Oops)" — "Now (God Help Us)."

The kids move with purpose.

They speak in hushed tones, as if Napoleon might be hiding in the supply closet.

Billy now walks with a slight limp, earned during the **Mongol Simulation Incident**.

Ethan's eyes have aged 30 years.

Girl With Glasses has started wearing a cape made from photocopied maps of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Trevor keeps muttering about the Treaty of Versailles and building tiny trenches out of glue sticks.

They no longer raise hands.

They file **memos**.

Barnard sits behind a **repurposed science table** someone dragged in from another classroom.
He didn't ask for it.

He simply said:

“Desk located. Good.”

On the board:

TODAY'S OBJECTIVE:

“Understand the Peloponnesian War.

Then reflect on how it's exactly like

*this school, only with more sandals
and fewer lawsuits.”*

One kid in the corner is doing a one-man
reenactment of the fall of Carthage using action
figures and ketchup.

And Barnard?

Still silent.

Still deadly.

Still wearing the same wrinkled corduroy jacket like
it's part of the school's founding charter.

He finally speaks.

BARNARD

Midterm's in three days.

No survivors.

And just like that—

They turn back to their tasks.

Eyes hollow.

Hearts pounding.

Minds sharp.

This... is **fourth grade now.**

Four Weeks Later...

No more juice boxes.

No more recess.

Only cold, caffeinated resolve and the faint smell of burnt erasers.

The walls now resemble a geopolitical war bunker.

There's a **pinboard** labeled "**Empire Crimes,**" held together with string, tape, and what might be a child's tooth.

The **Middle East section** takes up two whiteboards and has three active ceasefires negotiated during lunch.

The children speak in acronyms.

Billy has started answering to "Commander."

Trevor has stopped blinking entirely.

Girl With Glasses now wears two capes—one for *colonialism*, one for *peace efforts*.

Ethan tried to declare independence from the class last Tuesday. A small civil war ensued. They call it *The Sticky Note Uprising*.

And Barnard?

Still the same corduroy cryptid.

Still the suede Grim Reaper of Basic Education.

But now...

He leans on his desk like a tired dictator, scanning their battle-fatigued eyes.

BARNARD

Tomorrow, 0900.

You'll brief me.

Topic:

From **British Imperialism** to the
Israeli-Palestinian situation.

I want **memos**.

Both views.

Cited.

Organized.

Emotionally deadpan.

He doesn't explain "both views." That's part of the trauma.

He doesn't allow questions. Those died in Week Two.

BARNARD

Anyone who says "it's complicated" without footnotes will be exiled to the janitor's closet.

He sits. Sips tea made from a teabag that hasn't seen water in years.

The children break into task forces.

They form clandestine subcommittees.

Someone prints a map of the Sykes-Picot

Agreement and weeps openly.

0900 approaches.

Tick.

Tock.

Motherfuckers.

15:47 Hours.

Tension hangs in the air like leftover tear gas.

The door slams open.

A group of **self-declared Mossad agents**—four fourth graders in mismatched suits, dark sunglasses, and one with a drawn-on five o'clock shadow—storm in, dragging a confused **exchange student from Argentina**.

He's sweating, muttering in Spanish-accented English, clutching a pencil case like a legal defense.

Name: Klaus Benjamin Ehrenfeldt

Age: 10

Crimes: Unclear

Allegiance: Probably Pokémon

Main evidence: His last name sounds German and he knows “too much” about Paraguay.

The Mossad squad slams him against the supply closet.

LEAD AGENT (David S.):

We found him researching Operation Paperclip on the Chromebook.

AGENT #2:

His dad’s name is Dieter and he collects stamps.
You do the math.

AGENT #3 (whispering):

He speaks fluent Spanish *and* says "Buenos Aires" the right way. He’s clearly hiding something.

KLAUS:

(terrified)

I just wanted to print my volcano project!

Then—

Billy enters.

Still exhausted. Still in charge.

His eyes carry the weight of four weeks of
bureaucracy and two mock UN failures.

He scans the situation.

The room.

Klaus.

The trembling Mossad.

BILLY

(calmly, firmly)

Alright. Let's put our little Eichmann theories on
hold.

First of all—it's **not 1962**.

Second—**Hannah Arendt is dead**.

Third—this isn't *Munich*, it's **room 4B**.

Beat.

He gestures to release.

The Mossad agents sigh.

Loosen their grip.

Klaus slides down the wall, whispering, "*gracias a Dios*" like he just dodged the Hague.

BILLY

(stern)

Next time, bring me actual intel. Not paranoia and a German-sounding last name.

AGENT DAVID

(muttering)

So we're just letting Nazis go now?

BILLY

Welcome to diplomacy.

He walks away, already composing a memo titled:

*"On Overzealous Intelligence and the
Weaponization of Ancestry in
Educational Contexts."*

Trevor adds: “Find out who Hannah Arendt was” to the board.

Barnard doesn’t look up.

But he murmurs—just once:

BARNARD

Neutrality… requires teeth.

And silence returns.

Late Afternoon. 17:12.

Sun leaking through the windows like judgment.

Exhausted children scribbling memos, plotting timelines, googling land disputes and crying softly into pencil shavings.

Mohammad sits quietly at his desk.

He's been researching since lunch—British Mandate policies, 1947 partition maps, Al-Nakba, Oslo Accords, all translated into kid-brain language.

He works in calm.

Until—

A shadow falls.

Angus, a boy with the **sharp cheekbones and sharper accent** of inherited colonial entitlement, walks up with a wet wipe.

He **cleans the right half** of Mohammad's desk without asking.

Then, turning to **Rosenblumentalovich**, who's been quietly drawing tank diagrams since Week Two:

ANGUS

Right, this bit's tidy now.

You can use it.

Call it a *kibbutz*, if you like.

Pause.

Like a dropped glass in a silent room.

Everyone hears it.

Even Barnard's left eyebrow twitches.

Mohammad looks up—blinking.

Not angry.

Just... profoundly aware.

Rosenblumentalovich doesn't know what to say.

He's 10. He just wants to draw tanks.

But now he's on a metaphorical frontline.

And **Billy**—poor, exhausted Billy—looks up from a draft titled "*Colonial Shadows: Legacy of Empire in Playground Dynamics.*"

And realizes:

This is the real midterm.

Billy stands.

No yelling.

No gavel.

Just the grim resignation of a UN envoy at a kindergarten peace summit.

BILLY

Okay.

Angus.

You just unilaterally partitioned someone else's
workspace.

Without consent.

Under the pretext of sanitation.

And you offered it to **a third party.**

*Pause. He scans the room. The world holds its
breath.*

BILLY

That's **literal imperialism, my dude.**

And I need you to **roll it back** before we escalate
from metaphor to actual incident report.

ANGUS

(confused)

I was just trying to help. It's very cluttered.

BILLY

Great. You're now head of **Shared Surface
Negotiations.**

Write a treaty.

Get signatures.

No new kibbutzim without a two-thirds majority
and Mohammad's *express written consent*.

Rosenblumentalovich raises his hand.

BILLY

You'll mediate.

Also: please rename your tanks. They can't all be
called "*Peacekeeper*."

Mohammad returns to his side of the desk.

No shouting.

No fighting.

Just quiet diplomacy...

And a half-cleaned, co-managed desk.

Barnard exhales.

Almost a smile.

Maybe a hint of respect.

Maybe.

Billy stands frozen.

Mid-resolution.

Half-victory.

Mohammad sits quietly, elbows pressed in, now
working on **approximately 0.48 desks' worth of**
space.

His books are stacked vertically.

His notes now curve like a crescent moon to avoid
overlapping with the newly annexed kibbutz.

He doesn't complain.

He just adjusts.

The most haunting move of all.

And Billy sees it.

He sees it **too late.**

BILLY

(softly, to himself)

Oh no.

I Balkanized a child.

The classroom is calm—but it’s the kind of calm
that **precedes war crime tribunals**.

Angus is already drawing blueprints for a
“communal workspace expansion” with
Rosenblumentalovich, who’s now calling the right
side of the desk *Zone C*.

Someone offers to build a wall using stacked erasers.
Someone else volunteers to supervise water access.

Mohammad flips a page.

He is now writing in the **margin of a margin**.
And that margin is sacred.

Billy looks at Barnard.

Barnard doesn’t say a word.

Just slowly, methodically **tears a page from his own
notebook**, folds it in half, and drops it silently on the
desk like a judge rendering sentence.

Billy unfolds it.

One line:

“Fair isn’t equal. Fair is just.”

On the back:

“Now fix it, manager.”

Billy sighs.

Turns.

And walks slowly back toward the **bordered desk**—
ready to attempt the impossible:

De-partitioning without escalation.

17:49.

Tensions are no longer simmering.

They're **sautéing**.

While Billy plots peace like a janitor trying to mop
the ocean, the realpolitik of Room 4B **accelerates**.

Rosenblumentalovich, now wearing a tiny tie he
made from masking tape, is **deep into gentrification**

mode.

Armed with gel pens and historical amnesia, he's **drawing luxury condos** on the edge of Mohammad's vanishing workspace.

"Here's *'Olive Grove Heights,'" he says, sketching over the corner of Mohammad's notebook.

"Community-oriented. For everyone. Except Mohammad. Obviously."

Mohammad sighs.

Reclaims two centimeters of desk by shifting his elbow—but the next building is already planned: **"The Enlightenment Lofts."**

Then—

Enter: Chennedi.

New student.

Hair in a tight ponytail.

Eyes like satellite imagery.

She walks in like a UN peacekeeper who brought her own oil interests.

Arm in arm with Levistein—Rosenblumentalovich's cousin, visiting from another classroom and immediately granted honorary stakeholder status—she scans the blueprint.

CHENNEDI

(confident)

We need mixed-use zones.

Start with a tech incubator. That corner's perfect.

She points **directly into Mohammad's remaining 12% of desk.**

LEVISSTEIN

(grinning)

We can call it "*The Unity Hub.*"

Very inclusive name.

Zero actual inclusion.

Angus—already neck-deep in this mess—**shakes her hand.**

Because what's better than three fourth graders co-signing a territorial annexation?

Four, with matching Sharpies.

They begin **drawing thick lines** across the blueprint.

Borders.

Access points.

Trade routes.

Water features.

And across the desk?

Mohammad stares.

His notebook now split by a crude sidewalk.

He lifts his pencil.

Then puts it down.

There's nowhere left to write.

Billy sees it.

He feels the **gravity of failure**, of peacekeeping
turned passive complicity.

He sees **condos on top of context**, and a boy being
erased by **urban planning in crayon**.

And behind it all—

Barnard watches.

One eyebrow raised.

Corduroy silent.

Like God waiting to see if Moses actually *reads* the
commandments before chucking the tablets.

The lesson isn't history anymore.

It's happening.

And the clock?

Still ticking.

Tick.

Tock.

Motherfuckers.

18:07.

All illusions of order are gone.

We are past civilization.

We are in the **spit age** now.

Mohammad, cornered, silent too long, **raspberries**—

wet and defiant—**directly onto**

Rosenblumentalovich's condos.

Olive Grove Heights?

Drenched.

Unity Hub?

Now Unity *Sludge*.

Rosenblumentalovich, horrified, responds the only way he knows how:

Full-mouth, primal retaliation.

Spits. Big.

Over the desk.

On the timeline.

On Mohammad's handouts.

Colonialism is moist.

Chennedi, unbothered, slides him a water bottle.

No words. Just pure logistics.

She's now **Chief Hydration Officer** for Occupation Spitforce 47.

Levistein, from the sidelines, cheers like a dictator's boy-toy and gives Chennedi **reward kisses** on the cheek each time the spit hits a target.

Mohammad wipes the desk with his forearm.

Draws a **wet, shaking border** in pencil, now smudged beyond recognition.

A sticky UN of snot and saliva forms in real time.

No treaties.

No ethics.

No tissues.

And **Barnard**?

He doesn't flinch.

He doesn't interfere.

He simply watches from his desk like a **weathered**

war journalist at the edge of a humanitarian disaster.

Arms crossed.

Beard twitching.

Eyes glassy like he's watching mankind slide back into the primordial puddle from whence it came.

And then—

All eyes turn to Billy.

Billy, standing still.

Sweat on his temples.

The leader.

The manager.

The failed architect of order.

He surveys the battlefield:

- Spit-soaked desk.
- Drenched mid-century borders.
- Territorial warfare powered by juice boxes and petty vengeance.

- Kiss-based reward systems.
- One kid writing history with mucus.

Billy **closes his eyes.**

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

BILLY

(flat, dead inside)

Okay.

Everyone stops.

BILLY

New protocol.

If you spit again, you're all being put in a group project on **the Geneva Conventions.**

And you will be tested.

With real grades.

And oral presentations.

In front of the **fifth graders.**

Gasps.

The real kind.

Even Chennedi flinches.

Billy walks to the center.

Takes a ruler.

Wipes the desk.

Draws a **new line**.

BILLY

This space?

Now under **UN peacekeeping authority**.

That's me.

All disputes go through me.

All moisture-based tactics are banned.

Silence.

Drips.

Tension.

Then—

Barnard speaks.

Quiet.

Rumbling.

Like tectonic plates shifting under an ancient
civilization's grave.

BARNARD

About time.

And just like that—

Billy becomes a nation-state.

18:23.

The dust had barely settled.

The spit had barely dried.

Billy's line was still fresh—

When the **protests began.**

Girl With Glasses—now styling herself as a **movement** rather than a person—ties **three scarves** around her head, all color-matched to **Mohammad's checkered shirt**.

She begins **marching** in a slow, deliberate circle around the class.

Chants softly under her breath:

“One desk, one people, one pencil case.”

She crafts signs from scrap folders:

- *“Borders Are for Maps, Not Minds”*
- *“No More Wet Imperialism”*
- *“Desk Space = Human Rights”*

She stands on a chair.

Raises a ruler like a banner.

History class is now a riot.

Ethan, sweet optimistic Ethan, has arranged a **juicebox-over** at the far side of the room.

Two chairs.

One Capri Sun.

Two straws.

A plate of animal crackers placed symbolically between them.

Name tags written in cursive: “Mohammad” and “Rosenblumentalovich.”

Neutral setting.

Flags drawn with markers.

Even background music—*Lo-Fi Beats for Interfaith Dialogue*.

Ethan waits.

And waits.

And waits.

No one comes.

He sits.

Sips from one straw.

Then the other.

Whispers: "I tried."

Trevor, head down, sketching something chaotic in red crayon, mutters:

"It's complicated."

He does not elaborate.

He simply posts a note on the board:

"Sending bipartisan thoughts and prayers."

Then he adds:

"Also snacks."

Attaches a half-eaten granola bar with a paperclip.

The class is fractured.

Desk-occupiers.

Activists.

Diplomats.

Prophets of apathy.

And **Billy?**

Billy is managing a situation that now includes:

- A UN Peace Zone,
- A lone negotiator with sugar in his veins,
- A protest movement fueled by pattern-matching fashion choices,
- A conflict with no resolution,
- And the slow, inevitable awareness that **he has become the state.**

Barnard, unmoved, peels an orange with military precision.

Tosses a peel on the floor.

A metaphor?

A warning?

No one knows.

But Girl With Glasses steps over it dramatically.

Because **the revolution will not respect citrus.**

18:59.

The hallway begins to fill with the unmistakable sound of **SUV keys jingling, awkward shoes squeaking, and middle-class moral outrage heating up in idle.**

Parents are arriving.

And they're walking into a war zone.

One mother spots her son crying into a juice box while muttering "Sykes-Picot betrayed us."

Another sees her daughter waving a ruler like a

banner while chanting about desk sovereignty.

One confused father asks, *“Why is my child wearing four scarves and yelling at a globe?”*

Someone’s mom screams,

“What do you mean *he spit on the Ottoman Empire?!?*”

And Billy?

Billy’s at the front of the room.

Shattered.

Sweating cold.

His hands tremble.

His eye twitches like a geiger counter in Chernobyl.

He’s tried everything:

- Conflict de-escalation,
- Border redrawing,
- Peacekeeping operations,
- Micro-managing infrastructure,
- Ethical reform via juice-based summits.

And now?

He's got **twelve angry parents**, a **UN-flag made from a gym sock**, and the **burden of reason between irreconcilable fourth-grade factions**.

That's when **Barnard finally speaks**.

First time in hours.

Voice dry.

Sharp.

Almost kind.

Almost.

BARNARD

There you have it, Billy.

He stands.

Wipes orange juice from his beard with a page of Rosenblumentalovich's blueprint.

BARNARD

Your tomorrow assignment:

Memo me on that.

Explain what happened.

Show me reason in both sides.

If you can.

Beat.

BARNARD

Good luck.

He throws the orange peel in the bin.

Misses.

Doesn't care.

Billy nods.

Tears running.

Sweat clinging.

Eyes dead.

He grabs a notepad.

Writes the title:

**“Deskpace, Borders, and Juiceboxes:
A Failed Attempt at Balance.”**

Then underneath:

"Reason pending."

And as the parents start yelling,
and the children start hugging or spitting,
and the globe rolls into the hallway like a fallen
empire—

Barnard buttons his corduroy jacket.
Steps into the chaos.
And disappears like a ghost.

Tick.

Tock.

Motherfuckers.

Week 10.

Barnard has not spoken since the **Desk Partition Crisis**.

He doesn't need to.

His silence now **speaks policy**.

His **emails** are scripture.

And today—

A new one drops.

Subject line: **“Assignment: Regional and National Development Disparities Following Inter-Oceanic Travels.”**

Sent to **Billy**.

CC'd to the entire class.

No body.

No instructions.

Just the subject line and a link to an 800-page PDF titled *“God, Gold, and Goats: Trade and Empire in Early Globalization.”*

Billy opens it.
Bleeds from the eyes.

Elsewhere...

A kid named **Tomás** gets lost on the way to the
bathroom.

Ends up at the wrong door.

Room 4A.

He opens it—
And freezes.

Carpets.

Legos.

Art supplies.

Sunlight.

Laughter.

Cookies.

Juice boxes.

Only six kids.

Smiling.

Not twitching.

No manifestos.

No borders.

One waves.

“Hi! Want to play?”

Tomás flees—**runs back to Room 4B** like he just glimpsed heaven and wasn't ready.

Breathless, he yells:

“GUYS.

THERE'S ANOTHER ROOM.

AND THEY HAVE COOKIES.”

Panic.

Hope.

Joy.

Suspicion.

A heady mix.

Two kids stand immediately—**González** and **Cordovão**—child diplomats, revolutionaries, or maybe just hungry.

They shake hands.

GONZÁLEZ:

You go meet the kids on the right.

CORDOVÃO:

I'll meet the ones on the left.

GONZÁLEZ:

Each plays with the toy he finds.

CORDOVÃO:

And we sign something. For peace.

They rip a piece of paper from someone's lunch bag.

It bears the logo of a local bakery:

"Tordesillas Panadería Artesanal."

They write in marker:

*“Hereby divided by good faith and
mutual fun.”*

They march into 4A like the conquistadors but with
better PR.

Billy, hunched over his desk, sees the surge.
Kids abandoning models of the Columbian
Exchange to go play with **plush animals and safe
emotional development.**

He turns slowly.
Looks at **Barnard.**

The old man sits.
Motionless.
Sipping tea.
Eyes closed.

Billy squints.

BILLY:

Oh for *fuck's* sake.

Are you behind this?

Barnard doesn't respond.

But in 4A...

Kids cheer.

Cookies are distributed.

Juice boxes raised.

Peace.

Joy.

Unity.

For now.

Because Billy knows.

Inter-oceanic contact never ends in sharing snacks.

Week 10, Day 3.

The **Treaty of Tordesillas 2.0** has aged exactly like the original:

Poorly.

González and Cordovão now march **back and forth** between 4B and 4A, each trip more imperial than the last.

They've set up a **"Customs Inspection Zone"** by the door.

Trevor mans it, asking every returning student:

"Declaration of toy origin?"

"Any contraband cookies?"

"Do you intend to settle
permanently?"

Kids laugh.

But 4A isn't laughing anymore.

Specifically: the south of 4A.

That's where the soft toys, the shiny blocks, and the musical xylophone live.

And the children in that zone—**confused but well-**

meaning—are now **obediently stacking their own toys** into neat piles labeled **“Outbound – 4B.”**

González calls it “reallocation.”

Cordovão says “mutual development.”

Neither have blinked since breakfast.

In the corner, **a wooden duck on wheels** is quietly renamed **“reparations.”**

Meanwhile, **two kids in the north of 4A**, far from the cookie zone, sit isolated.

Forgotten.

One hugs a deflated bouncy ball.

The other slowly eats a cracker without expression.

Then—

Angus steps forward.

ANGUS

(quietly noble)

I'll go.

I'll play with them.

He doesn't wait for permission.

He just walks.

Into north 4A.

Unarmed.

Unannexing.

Just... playing.

He sits.

Says hello.

Picks up a puzzle piece.

And for the first time—**the north smiles.**

Back in 4B...

Billy is sitting alone.

In the teacher's chair.

Sucking a **Capri Sun** in silence.

Not as a treat.

Not as hydration.

But as **a coping mechanism.**

Ethan approaches.

Holds up a fresh spreadsheet titled "*Toy Flow Analysis: Post-Tordesillas Era.*"

BILLY

(staring into space)

I don't care anymore, Ethan.

Just label it "*colonial optimism collapse.*"

He sips again.

Eyes hollow.

Mouth full of strawberry-kiwi regret.

Barnard?

Still silent.

Still watching.

Still behind everything.

A corner of his mouth lifts.

Because he knows what Billy doesn't yet:

Next week, trade tariffs.

Week 10, Day 4.

Enter: Room 4C.

No one had noticed before.

The door was always closed.

No sound came out.

No teacher went in.

But now?

Now the whispers begin.

Trevor, half-joking, says:

"4C has, like, fifteen kids. No homework. No schedule. Just glue and chaos."

Girl With Glasses investigates.

Returns shaken.

She confirms:

- **No teacher.**
- **No adult presence whatsoever.**
- Children completely self-managed.
- Chaotic energy.
- Endless **arms and legs and potential.**

Some are drawing.

Some are taping markers to rulers and calling them "infrastructure."

One is staring at the wall muttering "I am the curriculum."

Another? Cutting paper into the shape of corn.

And none of it helps 4B.

None of it helps the cause.

Because **4C** isn't producing for anyone but themselves.

Their output is internal.

Isolated.

Undirected.

But—**Billy** sees it.

Oh, he sees it.

All those bodies. All that time. All those arms and legs... and no deliverables.

He turns to **González and Cordovão**, now dressed in custom sashes labeled "*Trade Ambassadors*."

BILLY:

Do you realize what we're ignoring?

CORDOVÃO:

Yeah. 4C. Waste of skin.

GONZÁLEZ:

Total chaos. No strategy. No leadership. Just vibes and scissors.

BILLY (intense, trembling with visionary madness):

Exactly.

He unrolls a whiteboard and writes:

Phase II: Development Partnerships.

Subtitle: *“Making 4C Work… For Us.”*

The Plan?

- Redirect 4C labor to **produce toy output** for 4A.
- Justify it as **“Regional Collaborative Assistance.”**
- Funnel goods into 4B via 4A’s southern corridor.
- Maintain moral superiority by framing it as **"capacity building."**

Chennedi nods.

Trevor starts drafting a supply chain proposal.

Ethan suggests issuing ID badges to 4C members with productivity quotas.

Meanwhile, in 4C:

A child has built a monument out of glitter glue and shredded math worksheets.

They call it "The Monument to Refusal."

No one in 4C knows what's coming.

But Billy?

Billy is back in the game.

Sugar-rush and all.

Barnard glances up.

One eyebrow arches.

He says only this:

“Ah. Colonial subcontracting. A classic.”

And sips from his ancient mug.

Tick.

Tock.

Motherfuckers.

Week 11. Day 2.

It begins, as it always does, with **Angus**.

He returns from 4A—shoulders stiff, jaw clenched, **friendship stickers** on both sleeves, the haunted look of a man who gave too much to a people who forgot to send thank-you cards.

ANGUS

(furious, but polite)

Those *ungrateful little bastards*.

It turns out that **North 4A**, once the sad corner of
social exile and sticky puzzles,
had so little to begin with
that when Angus, noble and well-meaning, brought
4B kids to play and “*uplift the region*,”
the toys stayed.

Because the need was great.

And the kids were nice.

And the cookies were fresh.

Now?

Angus has friends.

He has respect.

He has a local fanbase.

But his **toys never came home.**

He should be angrier.

But he's **busy**.

He's formed a **grassroots initiative**, building bonds
between 4A and 4C kids.

Together, they're **digging metaphorical irrigation
ditches** made of Lego.

They call it "Operation Play Equity."

He's **teaching 4C kids to sort and repair** worn-out
toys from 4A North.

Mutual benefit.

Cross-room investment.

Unpaid labor.

But it's something.

Meanwhile...

South 4A has fully embraced the **"Send to 4B" culture.**

They ship toys, drawings, and surplus snacks to 4B with ceremonial flair.

Each shipment comes with a sticker:

*"With love, from your grateful
partners in development."*

They're building an economy based on **appeasement and export.**

González, now wearing a necktie made of glitter tape, calls it a **"toy-based neoliberal miracle."**

North 4A, though?

They've gone rogue.

They now push **"Develop North 4A"** as a strategy.

They're requesting **autonomy**,
investing in **local toy production**,
and have begun **issuing hand-drawn passports.**

Someone whispered the word “**secession.**”

Someone else drew a flag.

And **4C**?

Still fucked.

Still barefoot.

Still gluing noodles to paper and calling it
“infrastructure.”

Half their markers are dry.

The other half are edible.

They’ve started **naming the ants** in the corner of the
room.

And Billy?

He now keeps **Capri Suns** in his desk drawer.
And in his backpack.
And taped under his chair like emergency Xanax.

His eye twitches constantly.
He's stopped finishing sentences.
He just says: *"Sure. Okay. Fine. Great. Good."*

Today, he wrote a paper titled:

**"The Ethics of Horizontal
Redistribution in an Unregulated
Juvenile Market."**

He signed it:

Billy (Grade 4, Addict).

Barnard reads the email threads.
Sips his tea.
Doesn't smile.

But in the notes app on his cracked old phone, he types:

Next week: debt crisis.

Tick.

Tock.

Et tu, Capri Sun.

Week 11, Day 5.

It's no longer a classroom.

It's a **failed state with snacks.**

4A is unrecognizable.

Kids once full of joy now wear **hand-me-down clothes** from 4B's lost-and-found bin.

Their own toys?

Gone.

Either "donated," "reallocated," or "liquidated"

under phrases like “*joint ownership*” and “*synergy opportunities.*”

They sit in **assigned desks**.

Capri Suns are handed out at 11am sharp.

But they can’t ask for seconds.

And they can’t ask *why*.

One kid raises his hand to speak—he’s given a fidget spinner and a blank stare.

The walls say “*Welcome Partners!*”

The kids say nothing.

The 4C children?

A few now “play” in 4A.

But only technically.

They’re there—physically—yes.

But excluded.

Segregated.

They play in **clusters**, tight little clumps of rejected joy.

They are not invited into games.

They are not offered cookies.

They have Capri Sun access, but **no straws**.

One 4C kid builds a castle out of nothing but torn-up worksheet corners.

Another scrawls "*We exist.*" on a broken whiteboard in purple marker.

And the rest?

Let's just say—

4C is no longer just fucked.

4C is strafucked.

(Don't elaborate. We legally can't.)

And **Billy**?

Billy stands in the middle of 4B.

His shirt is untucked.

His eyes are bloodshot.

There are **four empty Capri Sun pouches** in each pocket.

He's slurring.

He points at Barnard.

BILLY

(stumbling)

YOU...

YOU DID THIS TO ME.

His voice cracks on the "me,"
somewhere between **fourth grader** and **Vietnam vet**
in a documentary.

He collapses into a chair made of Capri Sun boxes.

One falls over.

The kids flinch.

Barnard doesn't move.

He doesn't need to.

He just sips.

Sets down his tea.

Finally speaks.

BARNARD

There you have it, Billy.

Your next assignment.

Written by itself.

Billy begins crying.

Trevor begins typing.

Ethan just whispers, "capitalism," and draws
another wall.

Tick.

Tock.

The system devours all.

Week 19. Field Trip Day.

Location: State University, Department of Political Science.

Event: *"Youth Debate Day"*

Theme: *"Young Minds Engage!"*

Subtext: *"Let's laugh at the cute kids while they fumble over capitalism."*

Plan:

Local fourth graders come in, pretend to debate like tiny adults.

University undergrads chuckle, maybe clap, take selfies with the little revolutionaries.

Everyone leaves feeling intellectually superior and vaguely hopeful for the future.

Reality:

Thirty minutes in, the future **declares war** on the present.

Billy steps to the mic.

Eyes hollow.

Voice calm.

Capri Sun in hand—empty, flattened, weaponized.

He opens:

“From the ziggurat to Kissinger,
nothing changes but the font of the
suffering.”

Dead silence.

A poli-sci junior tries to interrupt.

Billy **destroys her** with a three-tiered timeline of
resource extraction models in pre-modern
Mesopotamia.

Girl With Glasses jumps in, wielding Arendt like a dagger.

Quotes *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and cross-references it with *Toy Redistribution Patterns in 4A*.

Ethan pulls up a chart titled:

“How Play-Doh Became Petro-Capital.”

Trevor reads a poem called *“Ode to the Peacekeeper Tank (Deluxe Edition with Sound Effects).”*

Three undergrads cry.

One sociology major whispers,

“I think I’ve been complicit.”

Another begins quietly **undoing their own student union campaign poster**.

A poli-sci bro tries to bring up "both sides."

He is met with:

“Both sides is the tool of the lazy.

There are many sides.

Not all of them deserve Capri Sun.”

The room **implodes**.

Faculty look on in horror.

The head of the department takes notes, then
deletes his own lecture slides.

The debate moderator walks out mid-session,
muttering:

“They cited Walter Benjamin in a
sentence about fidget spinners.

We’re not prepared.”

Barnard, sitting in the back,
nursing tea from a dented thermos,
says nothing.

But when Billy finishes,
and the last student sits down defeated,
and the last Capri Sun is drained dry,

Barnard leans slightly forward.
Just enough.

And whispers:

**"Field trip:
accomplished."**

NEXT YEAR

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – MORNING

The door swings open.

MARCUS, now taller, with a jawline hinting at rebellion.

GIRL WITH GLASSES, now sporting *brackets* that gleam like warning signs.

ETHAN, face dotted with acne and defiance.

They stand. Older. Smarter. Wiser?

The room hushes.

Enter: MR. BARNARD.

Exactly as he was. Time passed, but forgot him.

Wrinkled **corduroy jacket**,

Soft **suede shoes**,

A **checkered shirt** that refuses to die,

Hair and beard in a state best described as
“academic neglect.”

He looks around the room like a god surveying a
pantheon of fallen demiurges.

MR. BARNARD

(soft, vicious)

Nice to see you again, band of degenerate bastards.

The silence breaks. A bracket squeaks. Acne itches.

Marcus shifts.

They thought they'd grown.

They thought they'd won.

But this was *Barnard's* domain.

And he had been *waiting*.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – SAME MORNING,
MINUTES LATER**

Mr. Barnard drops his leather satchel like a guillotine. Dust rises from the desk. He speaks without inflection, as if quoting natural law.

MR. BARNARD

This year I'm teaching science.

First assignment:

"In humans, how many sexes are there?"

Report due by noon.

PPT presentation of findings by end of day.

He pauses.

Adjusts nothing.

Says nothing more.

Returns to his chair. Opens a thermos. Sips something that smells like rust and war crimes.

Silence again. Then chaos.

Whispers. Side-eyes. Panic. Taboo detonated at 8:03 a.m. sharp.

ETHAN

(stammering)

But like... are we talking chromosomal? Social?

Cultural? I mean—

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

(gathering notes)

Define “sex.” Biological, phenotypical, or assigned?

ZOË

Go touch grass, it’s obviously a spectrum.

All eyes slide to **Marcus**. He hasn’t moved. He closes his eyes. Breathes deeply like a veteran re-entering the jungle.

MARCUS

(sighs)

I know, I know. I’m Billy again.

Not a nickname. A *position*.

Billy is the Sacrificial Academic.

Billy writes the report.

Billy makes the slides.

Billy dies for the grade.

Pencils rise like bayonets. War begins.

NARRATION (V.O.)

Go, Billy.

Go like Prometheus on deadline.

Go like Galileo with a group project.

Go like the only sober man on a lifeboat full of influencers.

They didn't choose you.

They never *choose* you.

They just *know*.

You are the one who reads.

The one who footnotes.

The one who will die on this hill of epistemology
with MLA formatting and a bibliography in APA
just in case.

Go, Billy.

Wade through Reddit wars, academic journals, and
TikToks by angry 19-year-olds with sociology
minors.

Cross the minefield of chromosomes, intersex
conditions, hormone receptors, legal definitions,
bathroom laws, Judith Butler, and that one
YouTuber who thinks frogs have three genders.

Go, Billy.

And do not return with *opinion*.

Return with *citations*.

Return with *slides that animate properly*.

Return with the knowledge of the gods

—

and a bulletproof definition of "sex"
that will survive both Mr. Barnard
and the next PTA riot.

Godspeed, Billy.

Godspeed, you doomed little scholar.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – LATER

Billy types like a demon possessed by the ghost of Foucault.

His eyes bloodshot.

His fingers stained with printer ink.

He hasn't blinked since second period.

The others orbit him.

Debating.

Speculating.

Panicking.

Ethan argues with a wall.

Girl with Brackets is mid-infographic.

Zoë has declared sex to be a colonial construct and is building a papier-mâché model of gender fluidity using recycled oat milk cartons.

And Mr. Barnard?

He sits.

Still.

Like a tombstone watching weeds grow.

He doesn't speak.

He doesn't blink.

He doesn't *teach*.

Teaching, you see, implies *help*.

Mr. Barnard simply **assigns**.

And then he watches you try not to drown in the Mariana Trench of ambiguity he just tossed you into with a smirk and a question mark.

The clock strikes noon.

Billy hits "Print."

The report, 27 pages long, hums from the laser printer like a death chant.

He walks up.

Places it on Barnard's desk.

A silent offering.

Barnard doesn't move.

Doesn't even *look* at it.

He lifts his thermos, sips, and nods — not at Billy,

not at the paper —

just at the *universe*.

NARRATION (V.O.)

He said nothing.

Because what could he possibly say?

He'd already won.

Barnard doesn't grade.

Barnard *judges*.

Barnard is the boss fight at the end of the semester

who never raises a hand,

only lifts an eyebrow.

Go, Billy.

Prepare your PowerPoint.

You still have till 3:00 p.m.

To explain sex to a room

of terrified fifth graders

and a man who once made a substitute cry by

assigning *Gödel, Escher, Bach* for weekend reading.

Go.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – 2:58 PM

The blinds are half-closed. The air smells of dry-erase markers and fear.

Mr. Barnard flips through Billy's report with the grace of an executioner reviewing last words.

Each page turned is a guillotine drop.

He doesn't read. He *scans*.

His eyes, unblinking.

His mouth, a line that once smiled in 1987.

2:59 PM.

Billy stands at the front.

The smartboard glows behind him.

Slide 1: **“HOW MANY SEXES ARE THERE? – A
Multiperspectival Analysis”**

Yes, *multiperspectival*.

He’s 10 and already hates himself.

The class watches.

Mr. Barnard sets the report down.

Folds his arms.

Says nothing.

Of course.

BILLY

(clears throat)

So… uh… hi. This is my presentation. On… sex.

The… sexes. Human ones. Not… yeah. Anyway—

He clicks.

Slide 2: a chart with Xs and Ys doing things even the mitochondria are confused by.

BILLY

Sex is··· not just binary. I mean, traditionally, yes—
chromosomes. XX, XY. That's a thing. But also—

(turns page on cue card)

—we have conditions like androgen insensitivity,
Klinefelter syndrome, Turner syndrome, which
show that biology isn't as binary as gym class made
it sound.

Slide 3: **INTERSEX**, in bold.

BILLY

So intersex is real. Not new. Not rare. Just ignored.
And gender isn't sex. But also not *not* sex. Depends
on framework.

Slide 4: Three columns: **Biological, Legal, Social.**

Each full of contradictions, footnotes, and fire hazards.

BILLY

Some scientists argue there are two sexes. Some say five. Some say sex is a function, not a category.

Others say...

(slide click)

Slide 5: “IT’S COMPLICATED”, in Comic Sans.

The class giggles. Brackets Girl nods approvingly.

Ethan is bleeding from the ears.

BILLY

So, to conclude, asking “how many sexes are there?” is like asking “how many colors are in a flame.”

Depends where you look. And how you define “color.”

And if you're Mr. Barnard, it's probably a trick.

He turns. Looks the man in the corduroy armor
dead in the eye.

BILLY

I don't know how many sexes there are.

But I know it's not one.

And it's not simple.

And that's... probably the point.

Silence.

Mr. Barnard blinks. Once.

He nods.

Then:

MR. BARNARD

You may sit, Billy.

The room exhales.

Billy doesn't sit. He collapses.

NARRATION (V.O.)

And just like that, the boy who once cried because
someone erased his name from his desk...
became the kid who told the truth about sex to a
room of frightened children
and lived.

He was Billy no more.

He was Marcus again.

MR. BARNARD

(stands, slow and lethal)

What you delivered, Marcus, is a big steaming pile
of male cow manure. Let me help your newly
bracketed friends in the back — *it is BULLSHIT.*

The room freezes.

MR. BARNARD

You say *“it’s complicated.”*

It is not.

How many colors in a flame? Use a goddamn

spectrograph. You get wavelengths. You get peaks.
You get facts.

Not TikTok slideshows.

(turns a page from the report with disdain)

“Traditionally,” chromosomes are XX and XY, you
say.

Traditionally?

No. Scientifically. Statistically. Predominantly.

In living organisms — not in *Reddit forums*.

You brought me *tradition* like this is a wedding in
feudal Japan.

And you said, verbatim —

*“We have conditions like androgen insensitivity,
Klinefelter syndrome, Turner syndrome.”*

(pauses, glares)

Do you even *hear* your own words?

Condition. Syndrome.

Words we invented to signal that something

deviates from the norm so *hard*, the first instinct is to get a medical journal on the phone.

You are quoting edge cases and pretending they rewrite the center.

You brought me a map of exceptions and called it the territory.

(leans in, voice lower, like thunder before the strike)

Marcus.

If someone is born with three arms, you do not redefine the human species as *triple-limbed*.

You write a paper.

You call a surgeon.

You do *not* pretend that the biology textbooks have been gaslighting you.

(pulls off glasses, wipes lenses, not for visibility — for effect)

What you wrote is not a report.

It's a *compromise*.

Between what you think I want to hear
and what you're too afraid to say.

Now go back.

Rewrite.

Start from the *science*.

And leave the sociology to your oat-milk model-
maker in the third row.

You have until tomorrow.

And this time,
make it burn *blue*,
not vague.

(he sits. sips thermos. same silence.)

NARRATION (V.O.)

It was the only "F" ever given with a standing
ovation.

NARRATION (V.O.)

Remember the rule.

The unspoken, sacred, sadistic law of Room 5A:

The first delivery always sees the trash can.

No exceptions.

No survivors.

You could bring him Newton's Principia, rewritten
in blood and Helvetica.

You could solve the Grand Unified Theory using
alphabet soup and raw determination.

It still goes in the can.

Why?

Because Barnard doesn't want your *first thought*.

He wants the one that crawls out of the fire when
you thought you were done.

So... start over, Billy.

Peel off the empathy.

Strip away the nuance.

Put the sociology in a ziplock and bury it behind the gym.

Start with cells.

Chromosomes.

Population-wide statistical prevalence.

Say “anomaly” like it’s a scalpel, not a slur.

And when you’re done bleeding on the page,
when your confidence has been dissected and
rebuilt from raw protein and dread—

Then

—and only then—

maybe Barnard will nod.

Or blink.

But don’t count on it.

He hasn’t blinked since ‘98.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – AFTER SCHOOL
HOURS**

The sun cuts through the blinds like a forensic
spotlight.

The desks are empty, save for one island of chaos:
Billy and his crew.

Marcus/Billy

(jaw clenched)

Alright. No more metaphors. No more spectrum.
We're going in clean.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

(removing glitter stickers from laptop)

Deleting the “Sex is a Vibe” slide.

ETHAN

(frantically Googling)

Okay. So we start with gametes: sperm and ovum.
Binary reproductive roles. No vibes involved.

ZOË

(grudgingly)

I'll park my gender volcano project for now. But it's coming back for the ethics section.

MARCUS/BILLY

(to himself)

First delivery always sees the trash can.

This one's for the burn pile.

Let's make one that *scars*.

NARRATION (V.O.)

And so they did.

Billy and his team.

No longer a band of hopeful nuance-chasers.

They became data hounds.

Disciples of cold-blooded logic.

Priests of Occam's Razor.

This wasn't about politics.

Or progress.

Or feelings.

This was about *Barnard*.
And making a presentation
so sharp
he'd be forced to respect it.
Even if only by
not blinking.

MARCUS/BILLY

(quietly, loading Slide 1)
Make it so.

FADE OUT.

TITLE CARD:

*TOMORROW. PERIOD THREE. THE FINAL
SEX.*

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – THE NEXT DAY,
PERIOD THREE**

The lights dim.
The projector hums like it knows what's coming.

Mr. Barnard sits, arms crossed, sipping from his thermos of what is presumably regret steeped in despair.

Slide 1:

“THE HUMAN SEXES: A PRESENTATION IN THREE ACTS”

– Marcus "Billy" Callahan and Associates.

MARCUS/BILLY steps forward.

Hair combed.

Shirt tucked.

Eyes dead.

MARCUS/BILLY

Act I. Gametes and the Binary Machine.

Slide 2:

Two images:

One **sperm**.

One **egg**.

A silence.

MARCUS/BILLY

In humans, biological sex is defined by the type of gametes produced.

Male: small, motile gametes.

Female: large, immobile gametes.

Two roles. No third option in nature.

Function, not identity.

Slide 3:

$XX \neq XY$

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

(interjects, coldly)

Chromosomal patterns determine gonadal development, not haircuts or TikTok bios.

Statistical frequency: over 99% of humans fall into clear XX or XY categories.

Slide 4:

A bar graph.

ETHAN

These are edge cases. Turner, Klinefelter, Androgen

Insensitivity.

Combined? Less than 0.02% of the population.

Relevant in medicine.

Not redefining the species.

Slide 5:

SEX ≠ GENDER

in tasteful serif.

ZOË

Gender? Culture.

Expression.

Social contract.

But sex?

Sex is biology.

And biology is the hill we chose to die on today.

Slide 6:

A microscope. A scalpel. A footnote to a Lancet article.

MARCUS/BILLY

You asked how many sexes there are.

Our answer:

Two.

Observed. Measurable. Reproducible.

Everything else belongs to another question.

Slide 7:

Black screen. White letters:

“THE EXCEPTIONS PROVE THE RULE.”

MARCUS/BILLY

We respect the exceptions.

We name them.

We study them.

But we don't rewrite the entire map for every rare mountain.

That's not science. That's poetry.

They step back.

Silence.

Barnard sips.

Stares.

Then—

MR. BARNARD

(hard to read)

You delivered facts.

Citations.

Structure.

Minimal drama.

No glitter.

(leans back)

Tolerable.

NARRATION (V.O.)

It was the closest thing to a compliment Mr.

Barnard had ever given.

In some cultures, it would have made them gods.

In 5A, it made them pass.

FADE OUT.

GOD. SPEED. BILLY.

AND TEAM.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – WEEK 2, MONDAY
MORNING**

The door creaks open with cinematic menace.

Mr. Barnard steps in, coat still soaked from a rain
that nobody else remembers.

Behind him trail four strangers — kids, roughly 5A
age, but with the blank-eyed certainty of cult
survivors and YouTube comment sections.

He says nothing.

Lines them up like a firing squad of stupidity.

They speak, one by one:

KID 1

The Earth is flat.

KID 2

Vaccines are harmful. Herd immunity is better.

KID 3

They're spraying chemical trails in the sky. To control us.

KID 4

Homeopathy works. Water remembers.

A silence. Barnard turns to his class.

MR. BARNARD

Task 1 is easy.

Prove them wrong. One by one.

Bring data. Models. Double-blind studies. Tidal equations. Pasteur's ghost if necessary.

(pause. lets it simmer.)

Task 2?

Convince them.

(beat)

Not the teacher. Not me.

Them.

The kid who thinks gravity is a hoax.

The one whose aunt died *after* getting the flu shot
— “coincidence?”

The walking Alex Jones tribute act.

The girl who thinks her water bottle has trauma.

Convince them.

One by one.

Without yelling. Without memes. Without calling
them dumb.

Good luck.

NARRATION (V.O.)

And so it was.

The gauntlet of **Week 2**.

Not a science test.

A conversion.

This time, the enemy wasn't ignorance.

It was *certainty*.

And certainty, as Barnard knew, is immune to facts

until it bleeds.

Results due next week.

Burn your flashcards.

Bring your soul.

God help you, Billy.

Again.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – WAR ROOM MODE –
MONDAY AFTERNOON**

The lights are off.

The projector glows with the first slide of what will
become the **Great Counter-Offensive**.

**Slide 1: THE FLAT EARTHERS MUST DIE
(INTELLECTUALLY)**

ETHAN

I've got the math. Circumference, curvature, ship
over horizon, gyroscopic precession, you name it.

But he *believes* in Antarctica being a wall.

He drew it on a napkin.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

We get him with Foucault's Pendulum. If that doesn't work, we send him up in a weather balloon with a GoPro and a Xanax.

MARCUS/BILLY

Focus on making *him* say it. Don't humiliate. Lead the horse to heliocentricity.

Slide 2: THE ANTI-VAX KID

ZOË

Okay, emotionally: dead aunt = trauma = distrust.

I hit with: vaccines don't *prevent* all disease, they reduce severity and transmission.

I'll bring in the Polio Eradication map.

ETHAN

Add in herd immunity stats from 1930 to now. Use measles. It's flashy.

MARCUS/BILLY

Make sure to mention: correlation \neq causation. But kindly. Like explaining to a cat that the laser pointer isn't food.

Slide 3: THE CHEMTRAIL KID

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

He's going to say "barium" within two minutes.

ZOË

Bring in contrail formation physics. Atmospheric pressure, condensation, jet engines, etc. Use diagrams.

And clouds.

So many clouds.

ETHAN

Can I bring my dad's pilot logbook?

MARCUS/BILLY

Only if he doesn't land it on the conspiracy kid's face. Respect the cult. Disassemble gently.

Slide 4: THE HOMEOPATHY GIRL

ZOË

She believes water has *emotions*.

I'm gonna cry in a bottle and offer it as antidepressant.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

Succussion. Dilution. Avogadro's number. We kill it with math and a pipette.

MARCUS/BILLY

But *then*—we offer a placebo-controlled study. And lemon juice.

She'll break when we show her sugar pills vs actual antihistamines.

ETHAN

Also, I'll drink her memory water and claim I now speak French.

Slide 5: OPERATION MINDSWEEP

"Facts win debates. Empathy wins conversions."

MARCUS/BILLY

We do the science.

We do the slides.

But we talk like humans.

We're not here to humiliate.

We're here to *extract*.

Extract belief from ignorance.

Extract reason from madness.

This week?

We go in armed with **evidence**,
but we **win** with **patience**.

NARRATION (V.O.)

It wouldn't be easy.

This wasn't just school anymore.

It was an exorcism.

Of lies. Of certainty. Of internet confidence.

Barnard had raised the stakes.

This wasn't a test.

It was a reckoning.

Results by next week.

Godspeed, Billy.

And Team.

Again.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – ONE WEEK LATER –
MONDAY, 9:00 AM SHARP**

The heretics are back.

The Flat Earther.

The Anti-Vaxxer.

The Chemtrail Prophet.

The Homeopathy Oracle.

Lined up like horsemen of the Mis-
Informationocalypse.

They smirk.

They've seen YouTube.

They've "done the research."

Then enter: Team Billy.

No projector this time.

No slides.

No lasers.

Just facts, voices, and war-hardened empathy.

PHASE ONE: THE FLAT EARTHER

ETHAN

(holding a globe and a mirror)

Light bends. Shadows fall. Ships disappear hull-first.

This is not magic. It's curvature.

But here's the fun part: you don't need to believe me.

Let's do an experiment.

He pulls out two sticks, a measuring tape, and trigonometry.

The Flat Earther's jaw tightens.

MARCUS/BILLY

You can believe NASA is lying.

But your own measurements? They don't lie.

Come outside.

He hesitates. But he follows. They return.

He looks... shaken.

PHASE TWO: THE ANTI-VAXXER

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

This is a baby. (holds up a doll)

This is smallpox. (holds up a 19th-century photo.
Grim.)

ZOË

This (holds a vaccine vial)
is why we don't see *this* anymore.

ETHAN

Side effects happen. In one in a million cases.
Dying happens... in the other 999,999 if we *don't*
vaccinate.

They hand over CDC charts. Show survival rates.
Then, Billy speaks:

MARCUS/BILLY

We're not calling your aunt a liar.
We're saying: maybe she deserved better science.

The Anti-Vaxxer doesn't speak. He just nods. Once.

PHASE THREE: THE CHEMTRAIL KID

ETHAN

This is a jet engine diagram.

This is a humidity chart.

This is a photo of a regular contrail from the 1950s,
before “they” were spraying anything.

ZOË

If they were controlling minds with trails...

Why are teenagers still eating Tide Pods?

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

Here. Read a pilot's weather log.

And here's a jar of actual barium. Still alive?

Chemtrail Kid looks at the jar.

Sniffs it.

Considers.

Puts it down. Quietly.

PHASE FOUR: THE HOMEOPATHY GIRL

ZOË

Homeopathy says water remembers.

So this glass of water has seen dinosaurs, sewage,
and Napoleon's bathwater.

MARCUS/BILLY

If dilution makes it stronger...

Then why is drinking the ocean not a cure for
cancer?

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

Avogadro's number says:

Past a certain point, no molecules of the original
substance remain.

Your remedy is statistically indistinguishable from spit.

Billy takes two “lethal” homeopathic sleeping pills.
Swallows them. Waits.

MARCUS/BILLY

Still awake.

The girl blinks. Stares at her bottle.

Holds it up to the light.

And places it on the desk.

THEY TURN TO BARNARD.

They don't smile.

They don't gloat.

They just wait.

NARRATION (V.O.)

They brought the data.

They brought the method.

But more than that —

they brought *doubt* into the minds of the certain.

They didn't win an argument.

They cracked a *foundation*.

One belief at a time.

Billy and his team didn't come to crush fools.

They came to plant seeds.

And, somehow... they bloomed.

The Flat Earther's drawing of the ice wall was gone.

The Anti-Vaxxer held the doll a little too long.

The Chemtrail Kid took a pilot logbook home.

The Homeopathy Girl?

She whispered to her water bottle,

"Forget me."

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – POST-PRESENTATION
SILENCE**

The projector is off.

Charts are folded.

Billy and his team stand, breathless, eyes still sharp.

Then the four kids speak — not shouting, not
flustered — just cool, practiced, and immovable.

FLAT EARTHER

These are your opinions. I think different.

ANTI-VAXXER

Your science says that. My science says different.

CHEMTRAIL KID

I read a peer-reviewed paper that contradicts
everything you said.

HOMEOPATHY GIRL

Non-Western science uses other paradigms.

With driven experiments, you can prove *whatever*
you want.

They look at Billy's team with calm disdain.
Like statues that no storm can weather.

BILLY

(starts to speak, stops)

They don't need facts. They have *footing*.

False footing, maybe. But it *holds them*.

They don't want answers.

They want symmetry.

A science for every science.

A truth for every lie.

ZOË

It's like punching fog.

They don't even hear us.

They just wait for us to finish so they can say "I disagree."

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

(disillusioned)

We didn't fail.

We just... weren't the point.

ETHAN

Maybe we should've just made memes.

And still:

Barnard says nothing.

He sits at his desk.

Unmoving.

Unsmiling.

Like a judge who already knows the verdict.

NARRATION (V.O.)

No applause.

No grade.

No validation.

Just the echo of futility bouncing off the chalkboard.

Because sometimes, science doesn't win.

Sometimes it doesn't even *compete*.

It just waits
for the collapse
of belief
under its own weight.

And Barnard?
Barnard watches.
Barnard waits.

Because he knew from the start:
Proving a fact is easy.
Convincing a zealot? That's Week 3.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – STILL MONDAY, STILL
HELL**

The silence stretches.
Billy's team is still standing.
Their notes wilt.
The science hangs in the air like smoke after a failed
coup.

The Four remain unmoved.

Eyes calm.

Spines stiff.

Certainty weaponized.

FLAT EARTHER

I still think it's flat.

ANTI-VAXXER

Your data's funded by Big Pharma.

CHEMTRAIL KID

Jet engines don't explain the patterns. Not all of them.

HOMEOPATHY GIRL

Your science is cold. Mine listens.

The class doesn't groan.

They just *sink*.

There is no victory.

Only the sound of epistemological despair.

Then Barnard rises.

MR. BARNARD

(quiet, slow)

Next Monday.

Round Two.

That's it.

That's all.

No feedback. No notes. No visible emotions.

Then he points.

At the clock on the wall.

Crooked. Loud.

TICK.

TOCK.

A long, gnarled finger.

A gesture from Death himself, if Death wore
corduroy.

Message received:

TICK TOCK, MOTHERFUCKERS.

NARRATION (V.O.)

No one clapped.

No one exhaled.

Only the second hand moved.

Each click a reminder:

Truth isn't enough.

Time is running out.

And next week?

The fog fights back.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – AFTER SCHOOL – THE
COVEN GATHERS

The room is empty now.

Except for **Billy**, **Brackets**, **Zoë**, and **Ethan** —

four kids who dared to bring logic to a knife fight

and got met with *philosophy in cargo shorts*.

The whiteboard reads:

**“ROUND TWO: CONVICTION VS
CONVERSION”**

underlined three times.

In red.

By someone who clearly wasn't okay.

ETHAN

(throwing down a stack of printed papers)

I brought more studies. They won't care.

ZOË

We didn't lose on data. We lost on *worldview*.

They don't want the truth. They want the *feeling* of
being right.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

(flat)

They brought *certainty*.

We brought citations.

We may as well have been waving soup cans.

BILLY

(quietly)

Then we don't fight them on science.

We fight them on narrative.

The room stills.

BILLY

We show them how belief collapses.

Not with humiliation — with *doubt*.

Just a crack. That's all we need.

ETHAN

What? Like inception?

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

No.

Like *Socratic Jiu-Jitsu*.

Questions that hurt. Slowly.

ZOË

We go personal.

Homeopathy girl? Ask her if her water remembered
the time she cried in the kitchen and no one
noticed.

ETHAN

Chemtrail kid? Ask why the government would
target *him*.

He lives next to a Arby's.

BILLY

Flat Earth? Ask if he's ever left his ZIP code.

Anti-vax? Ask if he'd rather polio make a comeback
just to be right.

They all look at each other.

This is no longer school.

This is *psychological counterinsurgency*.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

We don't refute them.

We *haunt* them.

ZOË

We plant the question.

The one they can't un-hear.

The one that festers.

ETHAN

We weaponize reality.

Make them live with it.

They nod.

War is no longer won with numbers.

It is won with **discomfort.**

MARCUS/BILLY

Alright, team.

No slides.

No bullet points.

Just voices.

Just pressure.

Next Monday.

We don't prove them wrong.

We make them **doubt themselves.**

NARRATION (V.O.)

Go, Team.

Burn brighter.

Cut deeper.

Leave nothing certain.

Next week is **Round Two.**

And this time?

Belief bleeds.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – NEXT MONDAY –
ROUND TWO**

No lights. No slides. No props.

Just four chairs. Four heretics.

And Billy's team standing before them like surgeons
with invisible scalpels.

They don't *present*.

They *descend*.

MARCUS/BILLY

(to Flat Earther)

When you say the Earth is flat...

Is it because flat things feel safer?

Easier to grasp?

When did the world first betray your sense of
control?

(pause)

If you stood on the edge —

would you jump?

Or do you secretly know there's no edge at all?

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

(to Anti-Vaxxer)

If your aunt had died after eating toast,
would you blame the bread?

(pause)

Have you ever lost someone
and needed *something* to blame
just to keep breathing?

(pause)

If the vaccine had saved her,
would you believe in it then?
Or would you call it coincidence?

ETHAN

(to Chemtrail Kid)

Why you?
Out of 8 billion people,
why would *they* target you?

(pause)

Do you think maybe the sky looks threatening
because you're scared of what you *can't* see?

(pause)

What if the trails were just clouds —
and the real control
was convincing you someone cared enough to follow
you?

ZOË

(to Homeopathy Girl)

When water remembers,
does it remember you?

(pause)

The you that cried when no one listened?
The you that whispered to a glass
because people were too loud?

(pause)

If sugar pills healed you...

Did you ever want more than just healing?

Did you want to be *seen*?

They say nothing more.

They don't wait for answers.

They never expected any.

They just *leave it there*

like a landmine under the soul.

They turn.

Walk back.

Sit.

NARRATION (V.O.)

No charts.

No applause.

No victory music.

Just silence.

And the echo of four ideas
suddenly unsure of themselves.

They didn't convince.

They *contaminated*.

They didn't win.

They made them **bleed**.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – SILENCE BROKEN

The heretics snap.

Cracks splinter the calm.

Certainty flares like a wounded animal.

ANTI-VAXXER

So now you make it *personal*?

You say anecdote isn't science — and then what,
you psychoanalyze me like I'm a frog on a tray?

CHEMTRAIL KID

You just dressed it better this time.

Same shit. Same smug.

You think because you asked “kindly,” it’s not
condescension?

FLAT EARTHER

What does it *do* for you, huh?

To stand there, so sure?

To poke at people’s lives like they’re puzzles you’ve
already solved?

HOMEOPATHY GIRL

You call *me* unscientific — and then talk to my
water bottle like it’s a diary.

Is that your science?

Your *religion*?

ANTI-VAXXER

My aunt died.

You used her.

For what?

To win a class presentation?

You weaponized *grief* for your little crusade.

FLAT EARTHER

You think you're helping?

You're not.

You're *indoctrinating*.

Just like the other side.

CHEMTRAIL KID

You think doubt makes you right.

But you're just scared like we are —

you've just got better vocabulary.

HOMEOPATHY GIRL

You don't care what we believe.

You just can't *stand* that we believe without you.

The accusations hang.

Barnard says nothing.

He doesn't even blink.

Just stands.

Grabs his thermos.

And leaves.

NARRATION (V.O.)

There it was.

The recoil.

The backlash.

The immune system of belief doing its work.

You didn't break them.

You *touched* them.

And now they burn.

No debate.

No conversion.

Just infection.

The disease was doubt.

And the fever had just begun.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – MOMENTS LATER

The tension still sizzles in the air like ozone after a storm.

The four “heretics” stand, defiant, breathing hard, still waiting for someone to draw blood or start clapping.

Barnard steps forward.

For once... he speaks.

MR. BARNARD

And...

scene.

(pause)

The room freezes.

MR. BARNARD

I think my first lecture might’ve stuck.

Science is a *method* of knowledge.

A system of discovery.

Self-correcting.

Always moving forward.

It doesn't involve *convincing*.

It does not argue for applause.

It does not seek validation.

It does not convert.

(pause)

Now—

a big round of applause for these four “heretics.”

(points to them)

They're **professional actors**.

They didn't cost me cheap.

Silence.

Then a collective gasp.

Then: the sound of minds snapping open like late-blooming orchids.

Applause begins — cautious, confused.

Then it grows.

Hands clap.

Feet stomp.

Laughter mixes in.

A few dramatic OH MY GODs from the back row.

The four actors smile — drop their personas like
heavy coats.

They step forward, shake hands with Billy, Zoë,
Brackets, and Ethan.

One of them hugs Ethan.

Another fist-bumps Zoë.

Brackets and Homeopathy Girl do a mock ritual
over a water bottle and dissolve into laughter.

NARRATION (V.O.)

It wasn't about truth.

Or lies.

It was never a war.

It was theater.

To teach that science doesn't *debate*.

It *discovers*.

And that belief, no matter how loud,
can never override method.

And Billy?

He smiled.

Not because he'd won.

But because he'd finally understood
what Barnard meant by silence.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – WEEK 10 – MONDAY
MORNING

The students are older now.

Not in years, but in posture.

They sit straighter. Speak sharper.

They've been through battles — facts vs fiction,
belief vs doubt — and now they're... *dangerous*.

Mr. Barnard stands at the front.

No coffee. No thermos.

Just a small, battered copy of *The Demon-Haunted
World* in his hand.

He reads:

MR. BARNARD

(calm, precise)

*Carl Sagan once said: "You know how much money
the United States has spent since 1945 on the Cold
War? Ten trillion dollars. cHow certain was it that
the Russians were going to invade? Well — not*

100%."

And yet we paid.

Prepared.

Stockpiled.

(pause)

MR. BARNARD

So why doesn't that same logic apply to climate change?

You don't think it's 100% certain? Fine. You're entitled to that doubt.

But if there's *even a chance*,
and the cost of doing nothing is planetary collapse...
What kind of idiot refuses to invest in survival?

A pause.

The students shift, listening now with the reverence one reserves for thunder that hasn't struck yet.

Then he steps aside.

MR. BARNARD

Zoom, please.

The screen flickers.

A waiting room clears.

And then: **Senator Wallace D. McGun** appears.

Real. Alive. Smug.

A climate change denier, proudly on record voting
against every international climate accord since the
Berlin disco summit of 1981.

MR. BARNARD

May I present... Senator McGun.

Not an actor.

Not a simulation.

He has agreed to give us one hour each week.

He is *open* to changing his opinion.

(stares down the class)

I suggest you don't waste it.

He walks to the back.

Sits down.

Arms crossed.

No smile.

MR. BARNARD

Go.

NARRATION (V.O.)

Week 10.

No more sock puppets.

No more simulated delusions.

This was a man with power.

With votes.

With *reach*.

And maybe...

with a crack in the armor.

The final experiment had begun.

Not in a lab.

But in a conversation.

Could reason survive contact with Washington?

Could logic outvote legacy?

Could science make a senator sweat?

Time to find out.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – MONDAY, 9:02 AM –
LIVE ON ZOOM**

The screen glows like judgment.

Senator Wallace D. McGun sits in his oak-heavy office, flanked by flags, a taxidermied marlin, and enough patriotic clutter to trigger a migraine.

He smirks.

The smirk of a man who's filibustered reality for 40 years and doesn't believe a pack of 5th graders can outvote his swagger.

Then: Team Billy enters frame.

Marcus/Billy.

Brackets.

Zoë.

Ethan.

They've faced Flat Earth.

Anti-vax death cults.

Therapeutic water.

Now it's time to face a living fossil.

MARCUS/BILLY

Good morning, Senator. Thanks for joining us.

We'd like to start with a simple probability game.

Would you cross a bridge that had a 10% chance of collapsing?

McGUN

(smirking)

That depends on who built the bridge.

MARCUS/BILLY

Exactly. And the planet? It's built by carbon and chaos.

We're asking why you voted against reinforcing the *only* bridge we have.

ETHAN

Let's talk cost. You said in 2009 that climate policy was "too expensive."

What's the price tag of *New Orleans underwater*?

Of climate refugees in millions?

Of Florida turning into Atlantis with good golf courses?

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

Here's data from the Department of Defense — not Greenpeace, *Defense* — listing climate change as a "threat multiplier."

It destabilizes regions, causes war, famine,
migration.

Why do you fund missiles but not mitigation?

ZOË

Let's go moral. You believe in "protecting the
unborn."

So why doom them to a world of wildfires, poisoned
oceans, and food collapse?

(pause)

You're not anti-science, Senator.

You're just selectively faithful.

Like a man praying for rain with an umbrella in the
closet.

MARCUS/BILLY

You don't have to say yes.

You just have to say maybe.
Because *science doesn't need belief*.
It needs action.
And we're giving you a second chance.
Right here. Right now.
On camera.

The Senator blinks.

Just once.
Not a concession —
But a microquake.
A tremor.

NARRATION (V.O.)

They didn't shout.
They didn't shame.
They out-logic'd a legacy politician
with charts, questions, and knives made of facts.

Week 10 wasn't a lesson.

It was a *campaign*.

And they just went on the offensive.

Go, Billy and team.

Go.

The Capitol is next.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – ZOOM STILL LIVE –

9:17 AM

The camera wobbles.

McGun's face disappears from frame.

The angle shifts, pixelates, refocuses—

Revealing a **mahogany war table** behind him,
surrounded by a firing squad of credentials.

Six people.

Blazers. Horn-rimmed glasses.

Chiseled jaws and CVs longer than summer.

A geologist. An economist. A political scientist.

Two engineers. One with a beard that's probably published more than anyone in the room.

And of course—

Dr. Brenda Wexler, climate model skeptic, known for the 204-page takedown of IPCC models titled *"Unsettled, Unfunded, Unbothered."*

McGUN (O.S.)

You thought I'd come alone?

This isn't a TED talk, kids.

You're not debating me.

You're debating *them*.

(pauses, camera zooms slightly)

My team of PhDs.

Tenure. Think tanks. Real experience.

They don't just believe the models are wrong.

They write new ones.

And they've agreed to spend their Mondays right here.

One hour.

You vs them.

He leans back into frame, smugly restored.

Swivels his chair like he's hosting the final round of
The Weakest Link: Reality Edition.

McGUN

So go ahead.

Show me what your science class can do
against *actual* scientists.

The classroom is silent.

NARRATION (V.O.)

This wasn't a test anymore.

This was *trial by fire*.

The monster didn't live under the bed —
it had tenure, an H-index of 73,
and funding from six oil companies.

Team Billy wasn't just pushing back against
ignorance now.

They were facing the full force of **manufactured
expertise.**

Institutional gaslight.

Polished contrarianism.

Week 10, Round 2.

No sympathy.

No fluff.

Just a duel.

Four kids.

Six PhDs.

One hour.

May the method be with them.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – STUNNED SILENCE –
ZOOM STILL ON**

The screen is still filled with McGun's private league
of academic final bosses.

Six PhDs. Sharp suits. Sharper smiles.

The class is motionless.

Then —

Barnard stands.

For once, he speaks *without irony*.

MR. BARNARD

One concession.

(He walks to the board. Picks up a marker.)

He writes, in clean block letters:

climate.consultants@mit.edu

MR. BARNARD

They've agreed to assist.

MIT's Climate Systems Department.

Two professors.

One data modeller.

One science historian.

Real scientists. No agenda.

They're your consultants.

Use them wisely.

They're not here to win it for you — they're here to
keep you from getting annihilated.

He caps the marker.

Steps back.

MR. BARNARD

You now have the same thing the fossil fuel industry
does.

Advisors.

(pause)

MR. BARNARD

No excuses.

Use the hour.

Use the week.

Bring heat.

Then, without another word, he walks out of the room.

Just a rustle of corduroy
and the faint echo of a door clicking shut.

NARRATION (V.O.)

Barnard gave them no comfort.

Just resources.

The real war had begun.

A senator with six experts.

A classroom with four kids, a Gmail account, and
pure nerve.

No safety net.

Only science.

Week 10 wasn't the final exam.

It was the **real world**

—scheduled weekly.

At 9:00 AM.

Sharp.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – TUESDAY, 7:12 AM –
PRE-DAWN WAR ROOM**

The sun's not up.

But **Team Billy** is.

The desks are pushed into a tactical formation.

Laptops hum.

Printouts pile like sandbags.

Caffeine is flowing.

Hope is not.

Billy wears a hoodie that says **“TRUST BUT
VERIFY”** in duct tape letters.

MARCUS/BILLY

Alright. New rules.

This isn't about convincing voters.

This is about surviving intellectual artillery fire from

six academics

who were probably born citing footnotes.

ETHAN

(holding up a graph)

We sharpened facts.

We reinforced uncertainty margins.

I've got model discrepancies *pre-addressed*.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

(speaking fast, eyes wild)

IPCC reports. NASA aerosol indexes. Ocean
acidification pH gradients. Greenland melt metrics.

Our weapons are locked, loaded, peer-reviewed.

ZOË

And I'm the chaos grenade.

I'll hit them where it hurts: *ethics, legacy,*
intergenerational responsibility.

If the data stalls, I'll make their souls itch.

MARCUS/BILLY

Good.

But we don't just *respond*.

We ask.

We trap.

We make **them** explain.

Let them expose the limits of their confidence.

He gestures to the whiteboard — now a war map:

STRATEGY:

1. Ask what they accept as fact.
2. Force them to define uncertainty.
3. Challenge their models — not with ideology,
but with *complexity*.
4. Expose funding sources if necessary.
5. Use Sagan. Always use Sagan.

ETHAN

I also created a heat map overlay with predicted damage by county.

With McGun's home district glowing like a lava lamp.

Subtle.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

I've got the email from MIT.

They replied.

They're *in*.

They'll verify our models and prep mock Q&A by Thursday.

ZOË

I baked cookies.

They're shaped like drowned polar bears.

We're calling it "*climate grief*."

They all stare.

ZOË

What? It's messaging.

MARCUS/BILLY

Alright team.

This is not a lesson.

This is a live-fire zone.

We don't flinch.

We don't beg.

We interrogate.

The planet is the client.

And we are the last public defenders it has left.

NARRATION (V.O.)

They weren't kids anymore.

They were specialists.

Weaponized logic in sneakers and anxiety.

Armed with graphs, ethics, sarcasm, and one Gmail
lifeline to MIT.

The enemy had suits.

They had purpose.

This was the war of Week 10.

And science —

real science —

had come to fight dirty.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – THURSDAY, 3:45 PM –
CRUNCH TIME**

The fluorescent lights buzz.

The air smells like highlighter ink, desperation, and
quietly fermenting rage.

Team Billy is running on fumes, sarcasm, and three-
day-old moral outrage.

And then: *DING*.

Inbox. New message. Subject line:

**RE: Your Questions – MIT CLIMATE TEAM
RESPONDS**

ETHAN

(whispers like it's scripture)

They're in. MIT sent answers. And models.

Holy shit, one of them embedded a *calculator*.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

(actual tears)

They gave us raw satellite data.

They... they trust us.

MARCUS/BILLY

(staring into the middle distance)

We are not alone.

He opens the email. The PDF loads.

Charts, annotations, predictive scenarios, citations
that go four layers deep.

It's not just information.

It's **ammo**.

ZOË

(quietly, solemn)

Use the Force, Luke...

Use MIT.

Everyone nods.

They upload the files to their shared drive.

They cross-check with their arguments.

They layer it all into the campaign.

This isn't a project anymore.

It's a **strike plan**.

MARCUS/BILLY

Time to show Senator McGun and his climate
cavalry

what happens when you give a 5th grade war room
access to the Massachusetts Institute of Fucking
Technology.

NARRATION (V.O.)

The senator had experts.

But the team had a higher power now:

Open-source truth.

Verified.

Coded.

Sent at 3:41 PM EST by a doctoral student named

Kai who drinks too much cold brew and still believes
the world is worth saving.

Week 10: Final Round.

Use the Force.

Use MIT.

Use everything.

This isn't a class anymore.

It's a rebellion.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – MONDAY, 9:00 AM

SHARP – ZOOM: LIVE

WEEK 10 – FINAL ROUND

Senator **Wallace D. McGun** logs in.

Same smug posture. Same wood-paneled lair.

His PhD phalanx looms in Brady Bunch grid
formation beside him, like a chessboard with tenure.

But **Team Billy** is ready.

No stammering. No index cards.

They come armed with MIT in their back pocket
and murder in their Google Docs.

The timer starts:

60:00.

**59:41 – ETHAN (to Dr. Gellar, Climate Skeptic
PhD)**

You've argued models exaggerate warming trends.
We ran MIT's raw satellite data with the Hansen
calibration curve.

It matches IPCC predictions *within a 2% deviation*.

Question:

If the model is wrong, why does the Earth keep agreeing with it?

Dr. Gellar blinks.

He starts to respond. But—

57:02 – GIRL WITH BRACKETS (to Dr. Wexler)

Dr. Wexler, you claim adaptation is cheaper than mitigation.

Let's play that out.

Here's a scenario: global average temps rise by 2.5° C.

MIT model shows 200 million climate refugees.

Do you know the GDP cost of forced migration at that scale?

Because we calculated it.

And it's called **collapse**.

53:18 – ZOË (to Senator McGun)

You believe in protecting national security, yes?

Then explain why you voted *against* funding for grid resilience when the Pentagon listed climate as a top-tier destabilizer.

We have your vote record. Page 12.

(pulls it up)

Did the military go woke, or did the facts just become inconvenient?

49:46 – MARCUS/BILLY (to the whole panel)

All your doubts center on uncertainty margins.

So let's talk risk math.

You're saying, "Maybe it's not bad."

Cool.

So why don't we build the levee anyway?

You get a dry city *even if you're wrong*.

But if we do *nothing* and *you're* wrong?

We lose *everything*.

This isn't ideology.

It's **basic insurance**.

44:12 – ETHAN (screen share ON)

Here's thermal imaging of Greenland melt, 1990–2023.

Not from a journal. From NASA's open database.

Why's it melting, Senator?

McGUN

Well, it could be cyclical—

ETHAN

We ran the cycles. MIT ran them too.

This isn't natural variation.

It's heat with a *human fingerprint*.

Even your team knows it. They just won't say it.

38:04 – GIRL WITH BRACKETS (smiling gently)

Dr. Nguyen, you said the models can't account for every variable.

Correct.

But should we wait for perfect knowledge before we act?

Would you wait for a perfect hurricane forecast before evacuating a city?

30:17 – ZOË (to the panel, softly)

You all talk about doubt like it's noble.

But doubt doesn't help the people in Bangladesh.

It doesn't stop wildfires in Greece.

It doesn't cool Phoenix at 121° F.

Doubt doesn't save lives.

Action does.

17:42 – MARCUS/BILLY (closing argument)

You call us idealists.

We call ourselves *statistically literate*.

You've got credentials.

We've got data, models, and the luxury of **not being bought**.

You say we're young.

We say: **you had your chance**.

00:01 – Countdown ends. Silence.

The Zoom screen shows blinking faces.

Senator McGun stares.

No smile.

No quip.

He just nods.

Once.

Barely.

But enough.

NARRATION (V.O.)

They didn't dismantle the system.

But they cracked the armor.

They made a senator hesitate.

They made a panel of experts defend *instead of*
deflect.

And they showed what happens when truth

is wielded by kids

with spreadsheets,

and spite,

and one email address from MIT.

Team Billy didn't win.

They just made it impossible to keep losing quietly.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – ZOOM STILL LIVE –

9:59 AM

TIMER: 00:00 — BUT THE CAMERA'S STILL
ROLLING

A beat of silence.

The kind that follows a storm and precedes a
reckoning.

Senator McGun shifts in his chair.

The usual smirk has gone dark, unreadable.

Not rage.

Not defeat.

Processing.

He leans forward.

Clears his throat.

SENATOR MCGUN

Well.

You came loaded.

Respect that.

(turns to camera, dry)

You kids quote data like lobbyists quote checks.

(pause)

And... you're right about one thing.

I did say maybe.

That means I listen.

Doesn't mean I surrender.

(beat)

But you got one thing wrong.

I don't care what MIT says.

I don't care what NASA says.

I care what **voters** say.

And they're not scared of Greenland melting.

They're scared of **losing their job** if a regulation
kicks in.

They're scared of **paying more** for gas this week,
not about the ocean's feelings in 2080.

So if you want to win this war,
you don't just need science.
You need a *story* that beats fear.

He turns.
Gestures to the team of PhDs.

They're quieter now.
Some avoid eye contact.

DR. NGUYEN (engineer, MIT alum – ironically)

I stand by my critique of the models.
But... your questions were surgical.
You didn't argue.
You *interrogated*.
That matters.

DR. GELLAR (geologist)

The Greenland melt sequence?

I've seen it.

I just didn't expect a twelve-year-old to throw it in
my face with citation formatting.

DR. WEXLER (climate skeptic)

(smiling faintly)

I still think mitigation models are overhyped.

But you made me hesitate.

That's rare.

That's *dangerous*.

You should be watched.

DR. BRENNAN (policy analyst)

Your framing was brutal.

Risk math?

Insurance logic?

That'll get *through*.

To people like me.

DR. KALNIK (economist)

I still think renewables destabilize global markets if
done recklessly.

But for the record?

You made me flinch.

Twice.

McGun looks back at the camera.

SENATOR MCGUN

I won't vote green because you guilt-tripped me.

But I might vote green

if you *corner me with numbers*
and make my donors sweat.

And if you keep showing up with this level of heat?

(pause)

Well.

Don't stop.

That's all.

He ends the call.

The screen goes black.

NARRATION (V.O.)

They didn't flip the senator.

They fractured his certainty.

They didn't convert the experts.

They carved out *respect*.

Week 10 ended with no explosion.
Just echoes.
And doors—
opening
where before, there were only walls.

Sometimes, science doesn't win.

But it waits.

And waits.

**And then—
it walks in the front door.**

ChatGPT said:

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – POST-ZOOM QUIET –
BARNARD STANDS AGAIN**

The screen has gone dark.
The room still hums with residual voltage.
No one speaks.
And then — as always — **Barnard** breaks the spell.

He doesn't sit.

He doesn't smile.

He just looks at Billy.

Dead in the eyes.

MR. BARNARD

Billy.

Report to me.

(pause)

Did you pass the assignment?

(pause longer, colder)

I don't mean did you win.

I mean:

Did you learn something about **science**?

The whole room turns to Billy.

He doesn't flinch.

He's no longer just the kid with the backpack full of footnotes.

He steps forward.
One deep breath.
Then—voice calm, no tremble:

MARCUS/BILLY

Yes.
I learned that science isn't a speech.
It's not a vote.
It's not even a win.

It's pressure.
It's testing.
It's sharpening a question until it cuts through
anything.

I learned that being right isn't enough.
That being certain means nothing.
That truth doesn't convince anyone—
but it waits.

I learned that science is not a weapon.
Unless you put it in the hands of someone
who knows how to **listen**,
how to **doubt**,
and how to **keep going**
after losing the argument.

(pause)

I learned that science doesn't speak for you.

You have to earn its voice.

Silence.

Barnard doesn't blink.

Then, finally:

MR. BARNARD

(tiny nod)

You passed.

Barely.

(turns, walking toward the board)

Next week:

epigenetics and rats on meth.

Bring gloves.

NARRATION (V.O.)

He passed.

Because he failed the right way.

Because he *lost forward*.

Because he stood at the edge of knowledge—
and kept walking.

Science doesn't end.

It mutates.

And so did Billy.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – WEEK 11 – MONDAY
MORNING

The door slams open.

Enter Barnard.

He's pushing a massive **crate on wheels**, like he just robbed a museum or broke into CERN.

His jacket's dusted in graphite, his expression somewhere between deranged and delighted.

MR. BARNARD

Morning, degenerate bastards.

(pause)

Stand back now.

He grips the crate's edge—
and **tips it over.**

CRASH. CLANG. CHAOS.

A **metallic avalanche** of **calipers** floods the floor.

Hundreds. Thousands.

Dial, vernier, digital, analog, chipped, warped,
pristine.

Every kind. Every size.

They scatter like silver cockroaches across the tiles.

MR. BARNARD

There is **not one**
the same as another.

He walks, slow and deliberate, through the
wreckage.

The class parts like the Red Sea of calibration error.

Then—

He sets down a small, gleaming object on his desk
with reverence.

A **platinum-iridium cylinder**

—polished, heavy, absolute.

The standard.

Perfect.

Immovable.

Silent.

Barnard taps it once.

It doesn't ring.

It absorbs sound.

MR. BARNARD

Next assignment:

How long this thing is.

One page.

Technical sheet.

Include margin of error.

Instrumental, not personal.

No poetry.

No feelings.

Just measurement.

He says no more.

Returns to his chair.

Pours coffee from a thermos labeled:

“CALIBRATED”

NARRATION (V.O.)

And just like that—

science was no longer philosophy.

No longer activism.

No longer war.

This week, it was a quiet question.

Harder than truth.

Harder than belief.

How long is the thing?

With broken tools.

With imperfect hands.

With calipers that all lie differently.

Welcome to metrology.

The science of measurement.

Where certainty is dead
and only *error* is real.

Go, Billy.

Measure the unmeasurable.

And don't forget the margin.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – LATER THAT DAY –
CALIBRATION CARNAGE**

The floor glints with scattered calipers.

Each one a tiny liar in stainless steel.

The platinum-iridium cylinder sits on Barnard's
desk like a holy relic.

Unmarked. Undeniable.

A monument to **precision** in a world that can't even
agree on lunch.

Team Billy is already at war.

MARCUS/BILLY

(holding a digital caliper)

This one gives me 45.998 mm.

I try again — 46.002 mm.

Same tool. Same hands.

Different truths.

ETHAN

Mine's analog. Says 46.1 mm.

But the dial's cracked.

I'm guessing the truth now.

ZOË

I have a French one.

It measures in something called "freedom units."

Also it broke when I sneezed on it.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

I've measured 30 times.

Got 12 results.

My paper will include graphs, median, standard deviation, and 6 passive-aggressive footnotes.

They huddle.

Compare numbers.

No consensus.

Only patterns of failure.

MARCUS/BILLY

Okay. Let's face it.

There is no truth.

There's just... *error margins*.

ETHAN

So we don't find the right number.

We find how wrong we probably are.

And that's... the assignment.

ZOË

That's dark.

I like it.

They draft the sheet.

It's not a number.

It's a confession.

A map of **how close they might've gotten**
and all the ways they didn't.

Title:

"Estimated Length of Object X, \pm Everything"

NARRATION (V.O.)

This wasn't about finding the answer.

It was about accepting the **limits of your tools**,
the **imperfection of observation**,
and the strange glory of still trying to measure

something that will never fully admit to being known.

Science, this week, wasn't a war or a lecture.

It was a whisper:

"All we know is how little we know. Quantified."

Go, Team.

Error is the method.

Precision is the myth.

And this... is the closest anyone's ever come.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – FRIDAY, 08:55 AM –
FINAL FIVE MINUTES BEFORE BARNARD
ENTERS

Team Billy stands at the front of the class.

A single sheet of A4.

Laser-printed. Double-spaced.

Paper trembling slightly — not from fear, but from

the **weight of measurement in an unmeasurable world.**

They place it on Barnard's desk.

Right next to the platinum-iridium cylinder.

It doesn't move.

It doesn't react.

But the page does.

Here it is:

TECHNICAL SHEET – OBJECT X

Subject:

Platinum-Iridium Cylinder (Barnard Standard)

Objective:

Determine the length of Object X using varied calipers of differing calibration and integrity. Report includes estimated length and analysis of instrumental error.

MEASUREMENT DATA:

- *Range of measured values:* 45.89 mm – 46.14 mm
- *Most frequent result:* 46.01 mm
- *Arithmetic mean:* 46.006 mm
- *Standard deviation:* ± 0.07 mm
- *Outlier (digital caliper with soda damage):*
98.2 mm (excluded, but cherished)

INSTRUMENTAL ERROR ANALYSIS:

- **Instrumental variance:**
Calipers used were uncalibrated, some analog, some digital, one French.
Tolerances varied from ± 0.02 mm (digital) to ± 0.10 mm (dial with jam stain).

One caliper measured in inches until persuaded otherwise.

- **Environmental factors:**
 - Slight ambient classroom vibration from Zoë's nervous foot tapping.
 - Chalk dust interference.
 - The psychological presence of Barnard.
- **Human error:**
 - Misalignment.
 - Misreading analog dials.
 - Existential despair.

FINAL ESTIMATE:

46.006 mm \pm 0.07 mm

Rounded for clarity. Apologized for margin.

Respected the cylinder.

Conclusion:

Absolute truth was unattainable.

But what we gained was a statistical silhouette of
reality,

defined by error, sharpened by failure,

and drawn as close to truth as humanly possible.

Submitted by:

Team Billy

– Marcus

– Zoë

– Ethan

– Girl with Brackets

Week 11, Subjective Victory Pending

NARRATION (V.O.)

It wasn't perfect.

But it was precise **about its imprecision.**

And that, Barnard would say,
is the first honest page of science
they've ever written.

The cylinder remained silent.

But the paper had spoken.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – FRIDAY, 09:00 AM

Barnard enters.

No nod.

No coffee.

Just eyes on the desk.

The paper.

The sacred cylinder.

He picks up the sheet.

Reads in silence.

Face unmoving.

Like a dead satellite scanning Earth for signs of
discipline.

Then—

BARNARD

Yep.

He puts the page down.

Goes to the window.

Stares out.

NOT. A. SINGLE. SOUND. MORE.

Not even the sound of breathing.

Just... the whir of the ceiling fan,
the distant wail of someone failing long division,
and the internal *implosion* of Team Billy.

MARCUS/BILLY

(quietly, as if hit by a cosmic truth)

Well...

fuck us sideways and call us nanometers.

ETHAN

I printed five pages on instrumental drift.

He said “yep.”

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

I calculated uncertainty in twelve different systems
of measurement.

He said “yep.”

ZOË

I gave the cylinder a name.

I called it *The Silence of Mass*.

And he said “yep.”

They all sit down.

Not defeated—

but baptized.

By the Church of Absolute Indifference.

NARRATION (V.O.)

Science never claps.

Truth never thanks you.

And Barnard never smiles.

But “yep”

from a man who once rejected an entire thesis with
a cough?

That’s as good as it gets.

That's the sound of
passing.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – WEEK 12 – MONDAY –
PHILOSOPHICAL COMBAT UNIT

The door swings open like a prophet's robe in a sandstorm.

Barnard enters, flanked by two **familiar faces** — the actors from Week 2.

Smiling. Waving.

The class lights up with recognition, suspicion, and trauma.

ZOË

Oh no. They're back.

Do we have to argue about homeopathy again?

ETHAN

If one of them says the moon landing was fake, I'm leaving.

Barnard doesn't break stride.

He gestures at the actors.

MR. BARNARD

No ceremonies.

You cost me enough.

(pause)

In part, please.

The actors move to the front.

They turn toward each other.

No music.

No lighting.

Just **existence**, raw and flammable.

ACTOR 1

There is a God.

ACTOR 2

I don't know what to do with that information.

ACTOR 1

You can't prove He doesn't exist,
so you'd better believe in Him.

ACTOR 2

You can't prove He exists either.
I'm doing nothing of the kind.

They freeze.

Not theatrically.

Perfectly.

Barnard turns to the class.

MR. BARNARD

Class...

help them.

He sits.

That's it.

No instructions.

No rubrics.

Just a theological live grenade dropped on the tile floor.

NARRATION (V.O.)

Week 12.

No labs.

No Zoom calls.

No carbon molecules.

Just belief.

Doubt.

And the silence between them.

Science had trained them to measure.

But now?

They had to **mean**.

The war was no longer with climate deniers.

It was with **the unknown**.

And Barnard?

He brought actors.

Because even belief, he knew, is a **performance**.

Go, Billy.

Go, team.

Help them.

Or at least... don't make it worse.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – SECONDS LATER –
THEOLOGICAL MELEE**

Team Billy stands.

No laptops.

No graphs.

Just their mortal minds, four chairs, and an
ontological knife fight with no safety net.

MARCUS/BILLY

Alright. Let's start with the rules of engagement.

(to Actor 1)

You're making a claim: *There is a God.*

(to Actor 2)

You're not claiming the opposite — just withholding belief.

That's **not symmetrical**.

ETHAN

If I tell you there's a gorilla behind this door,
and you say, "I'll wait to see it,"
you're not rejecting the gorilla —
you're rejecting my *evidence*.

And right now?

You haven't shown any bananas.

ZOË

Belief based on lack of disproof?

Dangerous logic.

I can't disprove that Elvis is living in a submarine under Iceland, but I'm not starting a religion about it.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

Still — respect where it's due.

(to Actor 1)

You're appealing to **Pascal's Wager**: better to believe and be wrong than not believe and burn.

But that's **not belief**. That's hedging a bet.

Belief born from fear isn't faith.

It's **existential insurance**.

MARCUS/BILLY

Now let's flip it.

(to Actor 2)

Saying “I don’t know what to do with that information” isn’t nihilism.

It’s honesty.

Science lives there.

In the uncertainty.

In not pretending.

ETHAN

Belief without evidence?

That’s fine.

That’s **personal**.

But when you make it **public**, when you demand others believe it too?

Then it becomes a **claim**.

And claims require **proof**.

ZOË

You don't get to reverse the burden of proof just
because you're uncomfortable with doubt.

Uncertainty isn't weakness.

It's the most honest thing we have.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

So.

Actor 1:

You're free to believe.

Actor 2:

You're free to wait.

And neither of you gets to pretend you've got
certainty.

Because neither of you **does.**

MARCUS/BILLY

Truth isn't a sword.

It's a question mark sharpened until it draws blood.

They stop.

Actors frozen again.

Room completely silent.

NARRATION (V.O.)

They didn't settle the question.

They didn't define God.

But they defined **belief**.

They defined **knowledge**.

And they drew the border between them in
permanent ink.

They didn't help the actors decide.

They helped them **disagree better**.

Which, in Barnard's class...
was the point all along.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – MOMENTS LATER –
ESCALATION IMMEDIATELY DETECTED**

The door creaks again.
A new silhouette enters.

ACTOR 3.

Waves cheerfully to the students —
“Hey kids!” — like a beloved aunt who bakes
cookies and enforces inquisitions.

Then, a switch flips.
She steps into the role like slipping into steel.

ACTOR 3

I rule this place.
And I agree with Actor 1:
There is a god.

ACTOR 1

(hands her a blank sheet of paper)

For your records.

ACTOR 3

(takes it solemnly, then immediately turns to Actor 2)

Here.

(hands over the same blank paper)

This is a **list of things you can't do**.

Actor 2 holds it.

Blank.

But heavy.

Symbolism: weaponized.

MARCUS/BILLY

(quietly, to his team)

And now it's politics.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

Freedom of belief was Act One.

Now we're in **legislation**.

ZOË

Blank paper.

The **unsaid law**.

It could say anything — and that's the threat.

ETHAN

She doesn't need ink.

She has **power**.

And belief + power = **doctrine**.

MARCUS/BILLY

(to the class, stepping forward)

Let's be clear.

When belief gains power,
and that power hands you rules you never agreed
to—

even **symbolic** ones—

then we're no longer talking about faith.

We're talking about **authority**.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

Actor 3 isn't defending belief.

She's enforcing it.

With a smile and an empty page.

That's not metaphysics.

That's **governance by implication**.

ZOË

The danger isn't what's written.

It's what can be imagined

—and **punished**—

from what isn't.

ETHAN

Blank laws are worse than written ones.

They shift.

They grow.

They're *interpreted* into tyranny.

MARCUS/BILLY

(to Actor 3)

So let's ask:

Who decides what this page **means**?

You?

Him?

Or the person who says **nothing**
and waits for silence to become obedience?

NARRATION (V.O.)

It wasn't just about belief anymore.

It was about **power**
built on belief.

And the illusion
that rules don't need writing
to be enforced.

In Week 12, Barnard didn't ask them to solve the
mystery of God.

He asked them to face what happens
when God writes policy.

And signs it with
nothing at all.

Go, Team.

Define the page.

Before someone else does.

INT. CLASSROOM 5A – STILL MONDAY, NOW
FULL ON APOCALYPSE STAGE PLAY

The door opens **one final time**.

ACTOR 4 enters.

White **lab coat**.

Carries a **microscope** like a weapon.

Hair disheveled in the universal sign of "I've seen
data and it's not good."

No wave.

Just a nod.

The scientific seal of doom.

He takes the symbolic white paper.

Pretends to read.

Then, slowly, **places it under the microscope.**

He looks.

Then looks at the class.

Then back at the paper.

Then back through the microscope.

Like he just found bacteria spelling out "we're
screwed."

He turns to **Actor 2**.

Calm. Cold.

ACTOR 4

If you don't do this thing...

you die.

(to Actor 1 and Actor 3)

If **he** doesn't do it...

he dies.

ACTOR 3

(shrugs)

Too bad.

ACTOR 1

(sighs, piously)

I'll pray for him.

ACTOR 2

(tight-lipped, suddenly alone again)

I didn't write this page.

I didn't ask for this.

The class is frozen.

A new force has entered:

The cold necessity of empirical consequence.

MARCUS/BILLY

(to his team, low and slow)

And now we meet the third player.

Not belief.

Not power.

But **reality**.

GIRL WITH BRACKETS

This isn't ethics anymore.

This is a lab report with **blood in the margins**.

ZOË

Faith shrugs.

Authority says "too bad."

Science says: "Do it or die."

And none of them ask **what** the thing even *is*.

ETHAN

This is the full triangle.

Faith. Power. Evidence.

And Actor 2's caught in the middle—

no belief, no control,

just the possibility of dying

because someone else has conviction

and someone else has data.

MARCUS/BILLY

(to the room, steady)

So what do we do

when science demands action

faith refuses compromise

and power doesn't care?

ACTOR 2

(quietly, to Barnard, breaking the scene)

What *is* the assignment?

Barnard (from his chair, sipping thermos)

Survive.

NARRATION (V.O.)

This wasn't a debate.

It was **simulation warfare**.

A world built of belief, control, and cause.

The question wasn't "Who is right?"

It was:

What do you do when everyone else thinks they

are—

and reality won't wait?

Week 12 wasn't about proving anything.

It was about choosing:

When to resist.

When to obey.

When to measure.

**And who gets to decide
what the blank page really says.**

Go, Billy.

Go, team.

Class dismissed.

You're citizens now.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – MINUTES LATER –
BAROQUE MADNESS PEAKS**

Barnard stands.

No words. Just **ritual precision.**

He takes a **crude paper mitre** — folds, creases,
places it atop **Actor 1's head.**

The *Priest*.

Symbol complete.

Then, a **paper crown** — golden crayon, taped jewels,
slight mockery.

He sets it on **Actor 3's head**.

The *Sovereign*.

Structure complete.

The two stand — tall, ridiculous, terrifying in
implication.

Barnard walks to the board.

In thick, uncaring strokes, he writes:

**“Man will never be free until the last king is
strangled with the entrails of the last priest.”**

– Denis Diderot

The class exhales as if he just summoned thunder.

ACTOR 2 steps forward.

Still holding the blank law.

Still suspended between power, belief, and data.

He looks at **Actor 4**, the lab coat sentinel.

Actor 4 nods once.

ACTOR 4

If you don't do this...

you die.

No threat.

Just biology.

Just consequence.

ACTOR 2 walks slowly to the board.

Stares at the quote.

Lingers on "*free.*"

Pauses.

Then:

Strikes it out.

Single line.

Clean.

Unapologetic.

Above it, in block letters, he writes:

SURVIVE

Now it reads:

**“Man will never survive until the last king is
strangled with the entrails of the last priest.”**

The room holds its breath.

Not horror.

Not celebration.

Just **recognition**.

Something deep, feral, unspeakable

has just entered the conversation.

NARRATION (V.O.)

Barnard didn't teach them about science today.

Or belief.

Or even death.

He taught them about the **point** where systems
collide.

Where survival
overwrites philosophy.

They watched the sentence mutate.
From Enlightenment fury
to **existential calculus.**

This was no longer revolution.

This was **adaptation.**

And for the first time,
everyone in Room 5A
understood
what it *costs*

to be

alive.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – STILL MONDAY, STILL
UNHINGED – THEATRE TURNS EXECUTION**

Actor 2 stands beneath the board.

The quote now reads:

**“Man will never survive until the last king is
strangled with the entrails of the last priest.”**

A second passes.

Then **Actor 2** begins to shake.

Collapses slightly.

One hand gripping the air.

The other clutching his side.

He staggers.

Falls to one knee.

His voice cracks, frail:

ACTOR 2

Help... I...

I didn't follow the page...

He gasps.

Convulses.

Class watches — spellbound.

Then:

He slowly lifts his hand.

Forms it into a **mock pistol**.

Points it at **Actor 1**, the Priest.

ACTOR 2

(faint whisper)

Bang.

Actor 1 stumbles back, clutching his paper mitre.

Eyes wide.

Falls like an empire.

Then Actor 2 turns to **Actor 3**, the Crown.

ACTOR 2

Bang.

Actor 3 gasps — mock-regal and melodramatic — before collapsing under the invisible weight of lost authority.

The **priest** and the **king** lie dead on the classroom floor, paper hats askew like remnants of some ancient pageant.

Silence.

Then **Actor 4** — the Scientist — steps forward.

Expression neutral.

Holds up an imaginary syringe.

No words.

He “injects” Actor 2.

A pause.

Then—

Actor 2 rises.

Stronger.

Calm.

Balanced.

Like Lazarus with a PhD.

No paper in hand.

No cross.

No crown.

Just clarity.

He looks around the room, breath steady, as if to
say:

Now, I live.

NARRATION (V.O.)

They had witnessed it.

The death of belief.

The death of power.

And the quiet, clinical resurrection
by knowledge.

It wasn't mercy.

It wasn't magic.

It was **science**

waiting for its moment

after gods and kings had left the stage.

And in that silence,

when no one ruled,

truth walked in

through the back door,

with a needle.

And no applause.

**INT. CLASSROOM 5A – MOMENTS AFTER THE
LAST RESURRECTION**

**THE PAPER MITRE AND CROWN LIE
ABANDONED**

THE AIR IS HOLY WITH AFTERMATH

A beat.

Then—

Barnard claps.

Once.

Twice.

Slow.

Deliberate.

Like thunder rehearsing.

The class freezes.

Then follows.

Clap. Clap. Clap.

It grows.

From confusion to momentum.

From rhythm to **release**.

The **actors rise** from their pretend deaths.

Calm now.

Transfigured.

They stand in line before the chalkboard, solemn
and proud.

They turn.

Point.

All of them.

To the desk.

To the man in the wrinkled corduroy jacket.

Together—clear and loud:

THE ACTORS

The author.

Barnard stands.

Back straight.

Eyes somewhere far away.

And for the first time in recorded pedagogy—

He bows.

Deep.

Unashamed.

A bow like old cathedrals,
like equations that took lifetimes to prove.

And that's when it happens.

The room erupts.

Chairs are knocked over.
Desks pounded like war drums.
Backpacks tossed in the air.

Stadium-like cheers.

Screams.
Applause.
Someone throws a notebook like a bouquet.

ETHAN is crying.
ZOË is shouting "YES!" into the void.
Brackets Girl is clapping in a fugue state.

Billy just stands, hands in fists, like a soldier
watching Rome burn in reverse.

Barnard doesn't smile.

He simply raises one hand
as if to say:

It was inevitable.

NARRATION (V.O.)

They weren't cheering for the play.

Or the actors.

Or even the lesson.

They were cheering for the man
who handed them
the tools to set fire
to their own illusions.

They were cheering for the one who never lied,
never praised,
never held their hands—

But made gods die on Mondays.

And somehow, in that destruction,

"Solve it for me."

That's how it begins.

Fourth grade. First day. A class of innocent, twitchy children meets Mr. Barnard: a bearded cryptid in suede shoes who smells like tenured despair and maybe bourbon. No name tags. No worksheets. No plan. Just existential dread and a ticking clock.

When Marcus—soon renamed "Billy" without discussion—is handed the terrifying power of classroom command, everything spirals. Education turns corporate. Assignments become battle plans. Leadership means crying into Capri Suns and drafting memos on geopolitical toy distribution.

What follows is a war story. Set in a classroom. With crayons, capitalism, spit-based treaties, and historical trauma reenactments.

This is *His Name Was Marcus*, a story about